Feminism and Message Alignment within Girl Scout Camps

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ABSTRACT

FEMINISM AND MESSAGE ALIGNMENT WITHIN GIRL SCOUT CAMPS

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Northern Illinois University, 2020
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There has been a recent move in the United States for individuals and organizations to actively empower girls and women, provide them with equal opportunities, and help them build confidence. One organization that has been pursuing these goals is Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA), and Girl Scout camp is a specific setting in which the organization communicates empowerment, leadership, and inclusion to its members. This study utilized a feminist lens to explore message alignment within GSUSA, focusing on Girl Scout campers and Girl Scout camp staff as two important stakeholders who receive messaging from the organization. The researcher evaluated the alignment between messages communicated to campers and messages communicated to camp staff members. Additionally, the researcher evaluated the alignment between messages communicated to both stakeholders and the feminist values present within GSUSA messaging.

This study used semi-structured interviews with previous and current Girl Scout camp staff members to collect data, and a thematic analysis was conducted on interview transcripts for data analysis. The researcher identified empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity as themes communicated by GSUSA and communicated to both campers and camp staff members; however, the specific messages communicated about the three themes did not align among all stakeholders.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Chapter 1

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In recent years, there has been a move in the United States to actively empower girls and women. Efforts are being made to provide women with equal opportunities that level the playing field for them socially and professionally, and girls are increasingly encouraged to join science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. Efforts to provide girls and women with equal opportunities are communicated by various sources, ranging from nonprofit organizations that focus on social equality – e.g., Girls on the Run, WriteGirl, She Should Run, Girls Who Code, and Girls for a Change (“8 Organizations Empowering,” n.d.) – to businesses who believe women should have the same professional opportunities as men – e.g., Boston Consulting Group, Patagonia, and ADP (Christian, 2018). Additionally, social media efforts to empower young girls abound. Social media campaigns such as H&M’s “She’s a Lady” and Western Union’s “#TheRaceIsOn” focus on smashing stereotypes of girls and women (Econsultancy, 2018). The website A Mighty Girl provides a large collection of books, toys, movies, clothing, and blog posts for “smart, confident, and courageous girls” (“A Mighty Girl,” n.d.).

One organization that has been actively empowering girls and providing its members with unique opportunities to pursue their personal goals is Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA). GSUSA is a nonprofit organization that is part of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS). Not only are there 1.7 million girls who are current members of GSUSA,
there are also 750,000 adult members who function primarily as volunteers (“Facts,” n.d.). When thinking about GSUSA, people may focus on the fun activities and the pursuit of badges. However, GSUSA provides more than that.

For over 100 years, GSUSA has been emphasizing the importance of diversity and inclusion, pursuing racial and gender equality, and communicating values that align with a feminist perspective. This study seeks to better understand the messages GSUSA communicates to specific stakeholders, utilizing a feminist lens to explore GSUSA values communicated by the organization. There are many strong, conflicting attitudes about the feminist movement due to different understandings of the movement’s goals and intentions (hooks, 2015). Contempt toward proclaimed feminists, either from other feminists or individuals outside of the group entirely, is a constant theme throughout feminist history (hooks, 2015). However, using a feminist lens to research organizational communication is important because it draws attention to systems of equality and inequality within an organization and highlights the experiences of organizational members.

This study utilizes a feminist lens to explore message alignment within GSUSA, focusing on Girl Scout campers and Girl Scout camp staff as two important stakeholders who receive messaging from the organization. This chapter begins with an overview of GSUSA’s organizational details, followed by an explanation of the researcher’s use of feminism. After providing information about feminism, this chapter provides detailed information about the feminist messages GSUSA communicates to its various audiences. This chapter ends with an overview of message alignment and the three research questions posed in the present study.
Organizational Details

Since its founding, GSUSA has encouraged young girls and women to stand up for themselves and fight for equality by building their courage, confidence, and character. The organization was founded in 1912 by Juliette Gordon Low (“Our History,” n.d.), and it was built on both traditional and inclusive values (Arneil, 2010). Low created the organization to provide girls and young women with a sense of empowerment and independence at a time when women did not yet have equal rights, including the right to vote. Low passed away in 1927, but members of the organization made sure the Girl Scouts continued to grow (“Our History,” n.d.). GSUSA was chartered by the U.S. Congress on March 16, 1950 (“Our History,” n.d.).

When GSUSA was chartered in 1950, the organization’s members continued to promote the same messages Low had always intended. They emphasized traditional family and religious values while also promoting inclusive values (Arneil, 2010; High-Pippert, 2015). The “traditional” values pursued by Low and other organizational members focused on religious values, patriotism, and the activities and roles typically expected of women (Arneil, 2010). Early GSUSA handbooks called on Girl Scouts to be “‘womanly’ – meaning ‘sweet and tender’ and also maternal;” and early badges encouraged Girl Scouts to learn “traditional domestic duties” such as cooking (Arneil, 2010, p. 56). Currently, GSUSA does not place such a strong emphasis on its Girl Scout members learning domestic duties or following other traditional gender expectations (Arneil, 2010); however, the organization does still communicate traditional religious values and devotion to the country. These values can be seen in the pledges that Girl Scouts say – such as the Girl Scout Promise:

On my honor, I will try:
To serve God and my country,
To help people at all times,
And to live by the Girl Scout Law. (“Who We Are,” n.d.)

Girl Scouts recite the Girl Scout Promise at nearly every meeting and event, much like students recite the Pledge of Allegiance every day at school and stand for the National Anthem at every sports game. The Girl Scout Promise includes a promise for girls to serve God and their country, expressing the organization’s emphasis on traditional values. Additionally, the Girl Scout Promise includes a promise to live by the values presented in the Girl Scout Law, which is as follows:

I will do my best to be
honest and fair,
friendly and helpful,
considerate and caring,
courageous and strong, and
responsible for what I say and do,
and to
respect myself and others,
respect authority,
use resources wisely,
make the world a better place, and
be a sister to every Girl Scout. (“Who We Are,” n.d.)

The Girl Scout Law communicates personal values the organization encourages girls to adopt to lead better, more responsible lives. These two pledges exemplify the goals of the organization that have lasted through every stage of change the organization has undergone. Traditional values, as well as responsible personal values, have been foundational to the organization’s mission.

GSUSA’s mission statement explains, “Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence and character, who make the world a better place” (“Who We Are,” n.d., para. 4). Building young girls up to be strong, confident women who contribute positively to the world were the
goals initially proposed by Low (“Juliette Gordon Low,” n.d.), and GSUSA has since worked Low’s intended goals into the organization’s communicated mission (“Who We Are,” n.d.).

In addition to the traditional values that contribute to GSUSA’s foundation, emphasis on inclusivity has been paramount to the organization’s vision since its founding. GSUSA defines inclusion as “accepting or taking in others” and explains, “The opposite of this is exclusion, which is when you don’t allow or take in others” (GSUSA, 2020b, p. 14). Diversity and inclusion in Girl Scouts have been controversial topics for the last several years, but the organization began making strides toward acceptance of all groups of people long before it was culturally and socially considered necessary. Since the founding of the organization in 1912, there have been no barriers of entry regarding race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Austin, 2012). Low always advocated for the inclusion of every girl who wished to participate in Girl Scouting, and the organization has continued to communicate that inclusion (“Juliette Gordon Low,” n.d.).

The organization has grown tremendously in its efforts to be more inclusive over the course of its history (Arneil, 2010); and it has always pursued the goal of offering a safe place for girls to learn about themselves and the world (“Our History,” n.d.). GSUSA’s rich history of inclusivity and dedication to building up strong, courageous girls are two of the many ways the organization communicates feminist messages. The following review of literature provides a definition of feminism, a description of feminism’s goals, an analysis of the feminist nature of GSUSA’s communicated messages, and an overview of message alignment.
Feminism

The definition of feminism used to frame this study is one presented by hooks (2015), a leading scholar within the feminist movement. hooks (2015) defines feminism as a “movement to end sexist oppression” (p. 33) and presents four constructs that are challenged by the feminist movement. The four constructs are imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy (hooks, 2015). In her 2015 publication of Feminism: From Margin to Center, hooks explains:

Feminist movement has created profound positive changes in the lives of girls and boys, women and men, living in our society, in a political system of imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. And even though trashing feminism has become common place, the reality remains: everyone has benefited from the cultural revolutions put in place by contemporary feminist movement. (p. 51)

The feminist movement has helped our society evolve by challenging imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy (hooks, 2015). hooks includes these four terms when discussing feminism in many of her publications. She explains, “I often use the phrase ‘imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy’ to describe the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation’s politics” (hooks, 2004, p. 17). People are all affected differently by these political systems based on their unique identities. In an interview, hooks justifies her reasoning for using such a phrase:

The use of that particular jargonistic phrase was a way, a sort of shortcut way, of saying all of these things actually are functioning simultaneously at all times in our lives. And that if I really want to understand what’s happening to me right now at this moment in my life as a Black female of a certain age group, I won’t be able to understand it if I’m only looking through the lens of race. I won’t be able to understand it if I’m only looking through the lens of gender. I won’t be able to understand it if I’m only looking at how White people see me. (Sully, 2018)

hooks argues that drawing attention to the interrelatedness of imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy helps people understand how they are personally affected by all four
political systems simultaneously (Sully, 2018). Because hooks emphasizes the effects of these political systems, they will each be defined here.

In *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, Humm (1995) defines imperialism as “the control of one state or country by another, or the economic and ideological control of Black people by white.” (p. 129). Humm (1995) references hooks (1981) when defining imperialism, stating, “bell hooks argues that this condition applies internally in America, which was colonized by white patriarchal men who institutionalised an imperialistic social order in America not just in the Third World” (p. 129). To consider imperialism in an organizational context, the present study focuses specifically on the cultural aspects of imperialism and how GSUSA challenges “the economic or ideological control” (Humm, 1995, p. 129) of people with different cultures, beliefs or practices.

The second system challenged by feminism is white supremacy. Britannica defines white supremacy as “beliefs and ideas purporting natural superiority of the lighter-skinned, or ‘white,’ human races over other racial groups” (Jenkins, 2016). hooks chooses to use the term white supremacist instead of racism because talking about racism “was always, in a sense, keeping things at the level at which whiteness and white people remained at the center of the discussion” (Sully, 2018). Talking about white supremacist rather than racism allows for a “discourse of colonization and decolonization” as well as “the recognition of the internalized racism within people of color” (Sully, 2018). White supremacy foregrounds institutional structure and not rather than personal, individual beliefs (Sully, 2018). The present study uses hooks’ (2015) description of white supremacy when researching GSUSA’s communication in order to remain critical of the organization’s messages. By doing this, the researcher will not simply accept what
the organization communicates through words about race and inequality. Instead, the researcher will analyze GSUSA’s actions and the programs the organization provides.

The third system challenged by feminism according to hooks (2015) is capitalism. Humm (1995) defines capitalism as “the economic system in which the means of production are in private ownership” and states, “Marx described the exploitative forms of capitalism in his theory of the capitalist mode of production” (p. 29). Capitalism is a political-social construct that is challenged by feminism due to its oppression of women (Humm, 1995). Humm (1995) explains feminist views of capitalism:

Radical feminists, liberals and socialist feminists agree that there can be no understanding of the nature of contemporary capitalist society without placing the oppression of women at the centre of such an analysis. Nor can any adequate feminist theory simply add women as a ‘missing ingredient’ to an overall Marxist theory. (p. 30)

Feminist scholars express various beliefs on how capitalism oppresses women, but hooks (2015) focuses on the ways capitalism is interrelated with the other three political systems (imperialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy). Humms (1995) describes how capitalism is specifically related to patriarchy, defining “capitalist patriarchy” as “a historically specific form of patriarchy in which patriarchy operates through class and productive relations” (p. 30). The present study considers this definition of capitalist patriarchy and how capitalism and patriarchy are interconnected when evaluating how GSUSA challenges capitalism.

This leads to the last of the four political systems that hooks frequently refers to within feminist discussions, which is patriarchy. hooks (2010) defines patriarchy in *Understanding Patriarchy*:

Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with
the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (p. 1)

hooks explains how, out of the four systems, patriarchy is the one people learn the most about (2010). hooks (2010) states:

Of these systems the one that we all learn the most about growing up is the system of patriarchy, even if we never know the word, because patriarchal gender roles are assigned to us as children and we are given continual guidance about the ways we can best fulfill these roles. (p. 1)

Patriarchy is woven so flawlessly into the country’s social and cultural norms that people learn, possibly without realizing it, the roles and expectations placed on them based on gender (hooks, 2010). Patriarchy is possibly the most obvious system challenged by GSUSA since the organization is exclusive to girls and intended to empower and develop leadership skills in girls. The specific ways in which GSUSA challenges imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy are detailed later in this chapter.

hooks’ (2015) definition of feminism as a “movement to end sexist oppression” (p. 33) that challenges the four constructs described above is utilized as the framework for this study. These aspects of hooks’ (2015) arguments have been chosen specifically for this study because they draw attention to “systems of domination and the interrelatedness of sex, race and class oppression” (hooks, 2015, p. 33). This interrelatedness of multiple oppressions is called intersectionality, and it has become a concept that is salient in feminist discussions and research. There is no way to discuss feminism or utilize a feminist lens in research without considering intersectionality. The next section provides a more in-depth discussion of intersectionality and its importance to this study.
**Intersectionality**

Kimberle Crenshaw, law professor and social theorist, was the first to coin the term “intersectionality” in 1989 (Coaston, 2019), and she did so in an article she wrote about “demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex” (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw’s inspiration for naming a previously unnamed (but recognized) phenomenon came from a court case involving Emma DeGraffenreid (Crenshaw, 1989). In *DeGraffenreid v General Motors*, five women filed a lawsuit against General Motors claiming they were discriminated against due to being Black women (Crenshaw, 1989).

When Crenshaw discusses the importance of this case in terms of how it influenced her to create the term “intersectionality,” she often focuses on DeGraffenreid’s specific role in the lawsuit. DeGraffenreid was denied a position at General Motors, and she claimed it was because she was an African American woman (one collective identity rather than two separate identities) (Crenshaw, 2016).

The court dismissed DeGraffenreid’s suit, claiming discrimination did not occur in this case because the employer hired African Americans and hired women. In a TedTalk titled “The urgency of intersectionality,” Crenshaw (2016) explains the problem with this argument:

> The real problem, though, that the judge was not willing to acknowledge, was what Emma was actually trying to say. That the African Americans that were hired - usually for industrial jobs, maintenance jobs – were all men. And the women that were hired – usually for secretarial or front-office work – were all white. Only if the court was able to see how these policies came together would he be able to see the double discrimination that Emma DeGraffenreid was facing. (Crenshaw, 2016)

The discrimination that DeGraffenreid and the other four women experienced was not targeted toward their identity as women or their identity as African Americans. Rather, the discrimination
they experienced occurred because the two identities were both present in the same individuals (Crenshaw, 2016).

Learning about DeGraffenreid’s court case encouraged Crenshaw to develop the term “intersectionality” by thinking of a four-way intersection (Crenshaw, 2016). The roads in the intersection represent the way the workforce is structured, and the traffic driving along those roads represent the hiring policies and organizational practices that run through those roads (Crenshaw, 2016). At the intersection of those roads, individuals experience the impact of multiple traffics (hiring policies and organizational practices).

Crenshaw’s description of intersectionality fluidly places feminist values into an organizational/work context. The way individuals interact with one another, whether those interactions are solely interpersonal or expressed to an entire organization through practices and language, affect those who experience intersecting identities. The language individuals use toward and about each other, or the intentional exclusion of others, communicates specific messages about organizational beliefs and priorities.

By incorporating an intersectional lens into her definition, hooks (2015) makes feminism pertinent to everyone. The phenomenon of intersectionality is not unique to women. Men are just as much at risk of experiencing the negative effects of their intersecting identities as women are. Women, as well as transgender and intersex individuals, live with the potential risk of gender bias within the workplace; and even though men do not often experience gender bias toward them, they still may possess intersecting identities that make them vulnerable to bias and discrimination. Yes, feminism is for women – but no, feminism is not only for women.
It is important to understand and consider intersectionality when researching message alignment in the present study. As previously discussed, hooks (2015) describes how feminism challenges imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. Intersectionality helps us identify how the four constructs are interconnected. An individual may experience discrimination or bias toward them based on how two or more constructs overlap, such as imperialism (colonialism/cultural bias), white supremacy (racism/racial bias), capitalism (class bias), and patriarchy (sexism/gender bias). Similarly, a singular message communicated by an organization can challenge multiple constructs simultaneously. Intersectionality explains how the messages communicated by an organization, which in this study is GSUSA, can challenge multiple constructs simultaneously, which can make it difficult to discuss one construct without another. The following section explores feminist messaging within GSUSA and provides specific messages communicated on the organization’s website that challenge the four systems described above.

GSUSA’s Feminist Messaging

Reske (2018), drawing on Groth’s (1999) work, explains how GSUSA has never claimed to be a feminist organization and avoids using “fem-terms,” which are words such as “feminist” and “feminism” (p. 4). However, the organization’s growing communication of race, class, and gender equality are inherently feminist. One may question why GSUSA does not use fem-terms if the organization communicates values that align with a feminist perspective, but the reasoning is most likely due to conflicting attitudes toward fem-terms (Groth, 1999, as cited in Reske, 2018). Therefore, instead of using terms that would communicate direct and potentially controversial support for the feminist movement, GSUSA uses terms such as independence, self-
esteem and leadership; and Groth (1999) argues that such terms “function as a code for feminism” (p. 234).

This study does not argue that GSUSA is a feminist organization. Rather, it asserts that GSUSA has continuously grown over the last 108 years, and it currently supports values that align with a feminist perspective and that challenge the four constructs defined by hooks. Some of these values were discussed in the review of GSUSA’s history, but this section will explore more deeply the values GSUSA currently communicates that challenge imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy.

**Imperialism**

As previously stated, the present study focuses on the cultural aspects of imperialism, therefore defining imperialism as “the economic or ideological control” (Humm, 1995, p. 129) of people with different cultures, beliefs or practices. GSUSA currently emphasizes three main values that challenge imperialism. These values include: (1) serving girls and making a difference in their lives, (2) supporting and accommodating girls of all abilities, and (3) accepting and encouraging girls to express their cultures. The values have been identified through various pages on GSUSA’s expansive website.

**Service to Girls.**

The national organization communicates the importance of adults serving girls and making a difference in girls’ lives. Messages about serving girls challenge imperialism because, instead of exerting control over the interests and development of girls, adults serve girls and provide them with the resources necessary to have control over their own lives. This value can be
seen in the organization’s communication toward current and prospective adult volunteers.

GSUSA states:

To be a Girl Scout volunteer is to be a changemaker. Through giving supportive pep talks that inspire girls to aim for the stars, engaging them in activities that ignite their passions, or simply turning frowns into smiles, your mentorship and support helps girls grow into women who advocate for positive change in the world. (“Volunteer,” n.d., para. 2)

This example of GSUSA’s messaging to volunteers exemplifies the organization’s frequent use of service-oriented language through phrases such as “giving supportive [emphasis added] pep talks” and “activities that ignite their [emphasis added] passions” (“Volunteer,” n.d., para. 2). By keeping the focus on the girls’ experiences, interests, and needs, GSUSA discourages exerting control over girls’ lives. Instead, GSUSA encourages adults to support girls’ passions and provide girls with resources to make informed decisions.

GSUSA’s focus on serving girls challenges imperialism by purposefully giving girls control over their own lives and support for their choices and interests. This promotes acceptance of different cultural and personal values by leaving the power in the hands of the girls rather than in the hands of adults or peers who have different values, passions, or expectations.

Support for All Abilities.

GSUSA also challenges imperialism by communicating support for girls of all abilities. They communicate this support by providing Girl Scout volunteers and staff all over the country with resources and tips on how to support every girl. For example, GSUSA provides tips from two of their Volunteer Experts, Cheryl Lentsch of Girl Scouts Spirit of Nebraska and Bridgette McNeal of Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta, on how to support girls with disabilities during outdoor programming (“Girls of All Abilities,” n.d.). Lentsch and McNeal offer the following tips: plan ahead, set expectations, understand your girls’ abilities, create opportunities, and
always speak up (“Girls of All Abilities,” n.d.). By providing tips on how to support girls with disabilities during outdoor programming, GSUSA communicates that “every Girl Scout deserves the opportunity to challenge herself as she explores her world,” and the national organization genuinely wants individual councils to understand how to provide support (“Girls of All Abilities,” n.d., para. 1). Supporting girls of all abilities challenges imperialism because the organization adapts instead of expecting girls with disabilities to adapt.

**Acceptance of All Cultures.**

The third value GSUSA communicates that challenges imperialism is the acceptance and encouragement of girls expressing their various cultures. They show acceptance of all girls when emphasizing that “Girl Scouts is the place for every girl” where they are encouraged to grow in a “judgment-free zone” (“For Every Girl,” n.d.). Culture can mean a variety of different things to any one person, including traditions, language, norms, values, religion, and more. In GSUSA’s Blue Book of Basic Documents (2019), the organization states:

> All Girl Scout councils and USA Girl Scouts Overseas committees shall be responsible for seeing that membership is reflective of the pluralistic nature of their populations and that membership is extended to all girls in all population segments and geographic areas in their jurisdictions. (p. 23)

It is important to GSUSA that no Girl Scout program excludes girls in their region for any reason, and programs and/or councils cannot deny a girl admission based on “race, color, ethnicity, creed, national origin, socioeconomic status, or disability” (GSUSA, 2019, p. 23).

One aspect of culture that GSUSA specifically communicates support for is religion/spirituality. While the Girl Scout Promise refers to “God,” GSUSA (2019) explains that they make “no attempt to define or interpret the word ‘God’” (p. 24). GSUSA (2019) states, “Girls are encouraged and helped through the Girl Scout program to become better members of
their own religious group, but every Girl Scout group must recognize that religious instruction is the responsibility of parents and religious leaders” (p. 24). Additionally, even when a Girl Scout troop is sponsored by a specific religious group, “members of different faiths or religious affiliations within the troop shall not be required to take part in religious observance of the sponsoring group” (GSUSA, 2019, p. 24). Acceptance of all girls into Girl Scouting and the encouragement of those girls to practice their own spiritual/religious beliefs (or lack thereof) challenges imperialism because no cultures or practices are suppressed.

**Capitalism**

At first glance, it may not seem like GSUSA challenges capitalism. After all, it is not uncommon to see local Girl Scouts selling cookies outside of businesses in the spring. However, the Girl Scout Cookie Program challenges capitalism in a very unique way. GSUSA’s website explains the impact of the Girl Scout Cookie Program on girls who choose to sell cookies, stating, “Selling cookies gives millions of girls across the country the ability to power unique opportunities and adventures for themselves and their troops” (“Discover,” n.d., para. 1). GSUSA, the national organization, does not earn any money through the Girl Scout Cookie Program; rather, proceeds from cookie sales remain within local councils (“Think Outside,” n.d.).

The goal of the Cookie Program is to help girls “power new experiences for themselves and their troop,” through the girl-generated financial support of exciting trips, STEM activities, service projects, or attendance at camps (“Think Outside,” n.d., para. 3). By helping girls develop entrepreneurship skills that financially support the experiences they personally want to have, Girl Scouts challenges capitalist ideals.
The four political systems of imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy are interconnected, and the Girl Scout Cookie Program shows how capitalism and patriarchy can be challenged simultaneously. Humm (1995) defines capitalist patriarchy as “a historically specific form of patriarchy in which patriarchy operates through class and productive relations” (p. 30). The challenges women face in the workplace due to gender bias and sexism are perfect examples of capitalism and patriarchy colliding. The Girl Scout Cookie Program offers girls an opportunity to develop independence, confidence, and entrepreneurial skills in a safe setting away from the sexism and gender bias sometimes present in co-ed settings.

**White Supremacy and Patriarchy**

As previously stated, white supremacy in this study focuses on the belief that “lighter-skinned, or ‘white,’ human races” are naturally superior to other racial groups (Jenkins, 2016). Patriarchy is a political-social system, and this study focuses on the system’s insistence that cisgender males are “superior to everything and everyone deemed weak” (hooks, 2010, para. 3). Patriarchy also insists that cisgender males are dominant and entitled to “maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence” (hooks, 2010, para. 3). GSUSA challenges the political systems of white supremacy and patriarchy by emphasizing three values: (1) the importance/necessity of diversity and inclusion, (2) empowerment, and (3) leadership. The values communicated by GSUSA that challenge both systems of white supremacy and patriarchy are discussed simultaneously in this paper because discussions of race and gender are interwoven throughout feminism as well as throughout GSUSA.
Diversity and Inclusion.

When GSUSA was founded, the organization’s goals were revolutionary for women. Austin (2012) describes Girl Scouts as “feminist before feminism was invented” (para. 2). With the ultimate goal of empowering girls and the intentional lack of organizational barriers of entry, the organization emphasized the inclusion of all girls. According to one of GSUSA’s (2020a) documents on World Thinking Day,

Girl Scouts has always been a movement that is diverse and inclusive. From the very beginning, Juliette Low thought that girls of every ability and background should be able to participate in Girl Scouts. The first 18 Girl Scouts in Savannah, Georgia, included girls from wealthy families as well as girls from the Female Orphan Asylum and Jewish girls from Congregation Mickve Israel. (p. 7)

From the very beginning, GSUSA has prided itself in the diversity and inclusivity present within the organization. It is necessary to note, however, that the social climate during GSUSA’s early years was very different from the social climate present today. This is a necessary observation to acknowledge in a study such as this, as a feminist researcher cannot naively state that an organization was always inclusive of all people – even if it currently is inclusive of all people. Therefore, this section briefly reviews what “diversity and inclusion” realistically looked like in GSUSA’s early years before providing information from the current national website. An example of the difference in societal expectations can be seen within racial diversity and inclusivity.

Racial Diversity and Inclusion. While girls of color were accepted into the organization and there were no barriers of entry based on race, GSUSA was not fully integrated until the mid-1960s (Reske, 2018). The national organization tried for some time to introduce complete integration, but they acted timidly based on fear of public backlash (Reske, 2018). According to
Reske (2018), “Integration was slow because councils operated according to their racial views, and even though the GSUSA wanted more racial inclusion, it could not enforce councils to integrate” (p. 18). While segmenting GSUSA into several councils per state may have made it easier to reach girls across the country, it made it challenging to introduce and enforce racial inclusion.

The dynamics between GSUSA’s communicated traditional values and inclusive values shifted in the 1970s. In an article titled, “Gender, Diversity, and Organizational Change: The Boy Scouts vs. Girl Scouts of America,” Arneil (2010) describes the way GSUSA adapted to society’s changing social climate. The 1970s was a decade that caused remarkable shift in the trajectory of the United States in regard to social justice and equality (Arneil, 2010). This shift influenced many people to avoid involvement in traditional organizations such as GSUSA, leading to a significant decline in membership within GSUSA (Arneil, 2010).

GSUSA did not fight the changing social climate; rather, the organization embraced it. They bounced back quickly from their decline in membership because they adapted to rising expectations for social justice and equality (Arneil, 2010). GSUSA approached this situation as an opportunity to develop into a stronger organization by pursuing their goals of diversity and inclusion more openly and drastically. The organization has grown to comfortably and confidently communicate the importance of racial diversity and inclusion throughout their website and in published documents.

GSUSA’s current communication of racial inclusion can be seen throughout the national website. Within the topic of “Raising Girls,” GSUSA has a web page titled “Help Your Kids Take Action Against Racism.” The first thing the page says is, “Don’t ignore racism because it
makes you uncomfortable” (“Help Your Kids,” n.d.). On this page, GSUSA explicitly states its position on protecting youth from the negative effects of racism, and it calls parents to action.

The page explains:

 Whenever we see injustice, we all have responsibility to confront it. Every day, no matter our background or our age, every single one of us has a role to play in taking on an unfair system while working to build a new one that truly works for all. Guiding our girls in learning to recognize and challenge structures and practices that fuel inequality and cause harm helps them play an active role in creating the positive change our society needs. (“Help Your Kids,” n.d., para. 1)

To help parents talk about racism with their children in a way that helps girls “recognize and challenge structures and practices that fuel inequality,” GSUSA provides tips to parents (“Help Your Kids,” n.d., para. 1). These tips include: (1) “Be straightforward, ask questions, and listen to her”; (2) “Teach her to identify racism”; (3) “Teach her the value of diversity and inclusion, and to embrace our differences”; (4) “Empower her to challenge racism when she sees it”; and (5) “Learn and take action together” (“Help Your Kids,” n.d.). These tips provided on GSUSA’s website clearly communicate the organization’s dedication to ending racism and providing a safe space for diverse girls to grow. Even though GSUSA did not always communicate these messages throughout history, the organization has come a long way in standing up for equality.

**Gender Diversity and Inclusion.** Discussions of diversity and inclusion within GSUSA are not limited to race. GSUSA always speaks out about gender equality, not only for women and girls but for transgender youth as well. A look at Girl Scout badges from 1913 to 1999 shows the development of the organization’s views of gender and how they have communicated those beliefs to Girl Scout members (Anderson & Behringer, 2010). In 1913, when the organization had recently been founded, badges communicated predominantly traditional values that focused on domestic chores and the qualities women were expected to have (Anderson &
Behringer, 2010). By 1999, badges communicated more androgynous values (Anderson & Behringer, 2010). Rather than participating in a discussion of what different people should or should not be doing based on their gender, GSUSA began promoting the idea that everyone, regardless of their gender, can do anything they set their minds to (Anderson & Behringer, 2010).

GSUSA takes part in pursuing gender equality through their Girl Scouts’ Gender Parity Initiative: Fair Play, Equal Pay ("Fair Play,” n.d.). This initiative calls for companies to join the organization in “driving gender equity in the workplace” and explains the benefits companies experience when they are inclusive (“Fair Play,” n.d.). Companies who wish to participate sign The Girl Scouts Gender Parity Pledge, stating they pledge to increase gender parity within their company by “ensuring 30% of leadership positions are held by diverse female talent by the year 2030” (Fair Play,” n.d.). Once companies achieve this goal, they receive Girl Scouts’ gender parity certification and can promote their success, communicating they are an organization that is inclusive to women (“Fair Play,” n.d.).

Gender equality is also promoted within GSUSA by the inclusion of transgender youth. The organization communicates explicitly on the FAQ page what their position is on serving transgender youth. GSUSA explains that “placement of transgender youth is handled on a case-by-case basis, with the welfare and best interests of the child and the members of the troop/group in question a top priority” (“Social Issues,” n.d.). To clarify further, the organization states, “[I]f the child is recognized by the family and school/community as a girl and lives culturally as a girl, then Girl Scouts is an organization that can serve her in a setting that is both emotionally and physically safe” (“Social Issues,” n.d.).
The importance of gender diversity and inclusion, along with racial diversity and inclusion, is emphasized on GSUSA’s website frequently. However, GSUSA does not only “talk the talk.” They also “walk the walk” by establishing events and activities intended to educate girls on issues regarding social equality and to actively empower diverse communities. One example of such events is the annual World Thinking Day observed by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), GSUSA, and other WAGGGS member organizations (“World Thinking Day,” n.d.).

World Thinking Day 2020. Every year since 1926, Girl Scouts and Girl Guides from 150 countries have come together on February 22 to celebrate World Thinking Day (“World Thinking Day,” n.d.). World Thinking Day focuses on a specific theme each year, and Girl Scouts and Girl Guides are provided with documents to help girls explore the theme (GSUSA, 2020b). In 2020, the World Thinking Day theme was “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” (GSUSA, 2020b, p. 2).

Girls participating in World Thinking Day follow specific steps to explore the theme, and some steps have multiple choices so girls can take part in activities that are most interesting to them (GSUSA, 2020b). After completing the steps, girls receive a World Thinking Day award (GSUSA, 2020b). The five general steps for World Thinking Day in 2020 were as follows: (1) “Explore World Thinking Day and the diversity of the Girl Scout movement”; (2) “Explore inclusion and diversity”; (3) “Explore equity”; (4) “Prepare and plan a Take Action project for World Thinking Day”; and (5) “Carry out your Take Action project” (GSUSA, 2020b, p. 2).

Through activities described within each step, girls explore diversity, equity, and inclusion within their communities by learning about each term means, what they look like in
their own communities, how communities around the world are affected by the global marketplace, and how to help others to make their communities more inclusive and equitable (GSUSA, 2020b). World Thinking Day in 2020 is an example of the specific programs GSUSA develops to teach girls about diversity and inclusion. By dedicating World Thinking Day to diversity, equity, and inclusion in 2020, the organization taught girls the importance of each concept in their local communities and communities around the world, and the organization pushed girls to take action against injustice (GSUSA, 2020b).

GSUSA’s messaging about the importance of diversity and inclusion simultaneously challenges the systems of white supremacy and patriarchy. Because white supremacy communicates the superiority of lighter-skinned or white races, GSUSA’s emphasis on racial diversity, racial inclusion, and racial equality challenge white supremacist ideology. GSUSA provides members with information on how to challenge racism as well as events to promote racial equality. Additionally, the messages GSUSA communicates about diversity and inclusion regarding gender challenges the system of patriarchy. Giving girls and young women a voice and opportunities to pursue their own goals, regardless of gender norms or expectations, communicates to Girl Scout members (and others who observe outside of the organization) that cisgender males are not superior, and they are not more deserving of leadership opportunities solely based on their gender.

While messages about racial diversity and inclusion clearly challenge white supremacy, and messages about gender diversity and inclusion clearly challenge patriarchy, the systems and the actions that challenge them are interconnected overall. Intersectionality teaches that an individual does not experience bias based on one aspect of their identity independent from other
aspects of their identity. Race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, and other aspects of identity affect one’s life experiences and how one is treated. Therefore, GSUSA’s messaging about overall inclusion of every identity and the importance of diversity within local and global communities challenges white supremacy and patriarchy at the same time; and arguably, it challenges all four constructs because they are all interconnected.

GSUSA’s messaging that challenges white supremacy and patriarchy does not end with valuing diversity and inclusion. The organization takes action by empowering its diverse Girl Scout members and fostering members’ leadership skills. The next section explores empowerment and leadership within GSUSA and how they challenge white supremacy and patriarchy.

**Empowerment and Leadership.**

Low began promoting empowerment and leadership when the Girl Scouts was first founded by challenging gender norms and expectations. Historically, men have been encouraged to accept more responsibility and leadership than women in familial and professional roles, so Low opened opportunities for girls to learn new skills. She encouraged Girl Scouts to engage in activities that were not typically available to women. According to GSUSA’s website, there were specific avenues in which Low encouraged girls to expand their horizons:

> They played basketball. They hiked, swam, and camped. They learned to read the world around them – for instance, by studying a foreign language and telling time by the stars. They shared a sense of curiosity and a belief they could do anything. (“Our History,” n.d., para. 5)

Girls were given opportunities they were previously not given to engage in activities typically geared toward boys and men (Arneil, 2010). This communicated to Girl Scouts that “they could do anything,” even if they had not previously tried or succeeded (“Our History,” n.d., para. 5).
This idea of individuals being able to do anything, regardless of any societal constraints placed on them, is a result of empowerment. There are many definitions of empowerment and many views of the purpose of empowering organizational members (Cooke, 2002). This paper considers Beteille’s (1999) description of empowerment when discussing how it is promoted within GSUSA.

According to Beteille (1999), “Empowerment is about social transformation; it is about radical social transformation; and it is about the people – ordinary, common people, rather than politicians, experts and other socially or culturally advantaged persons” (p. 590). “Ordinary” people, disadvantaged individuals, and groups of people with identities that do not socially possess or invoke power are those in need of empowerment (Beteille, 1999, p. 590). Additionally, Beteille (1999) explains that empowerment “is both a means to an end and an end in itself” (p. 590). Empowerment can provide a group of people with the power needed to accomplish a goal and/or pursue equal rights; but it can also simply provide a group of people with a sense of power and the feeling they could accomplish their personal goals (Beteille, 1999; Cooke, 2002). In summary, when the term “empowerment” is used in this paper, the researcher is referring to the sense of power instilled in “ordinary” or disadvantaged people to pursue their personal goals or social equality (Beteille, 1999).

Empowering girls has always been a value of GSUSA, but the organization currently empowers more people through their inclusion of diverse youth. It is no longer just about empowering girls; it is about empowering all girls. GSUSA states on their website that Girl Scouts is “for girls” and “by girls” (“For Every Girl,” n.d.). The organization goes on to explain:

Everything a Girl Scout does – whether it’s climbing mountains, speaking her mind, or dreaming up new technology – has been developed especially for, and is tested by, girls.
Girl Scouts is a world where girls can do, and be, whatever they dream. ("For Every Girl,” n.d.)

GSUSA encourages girls to change the world, run a business, speak up for others, explore the outdoors, and “soar with STEM” ("For Every Girl,” n.d.). These are not actions or activities that were historically encouraged for women to engage in, which is why encouraging girls to participate in them communicates empowerment.

On their website, GSUSA outlines how girls are empowered by participation in Girl Scouts. The organization explains:

“As Girl Scouts, girls discover the fun, friendship, and power of girls together. Girls grow courageous and strong through a wide variety of enriching experiences, such as field trips, skill-building sports clinics, community service projects, cultural exchanges, and environmental stewardships. (“Facts,” n.d., para. 5)

In addition to the “enriching experiences” girls get through Girl Scouting, GSUSA also helps girls “contribute to the improvement of society through their abilities, leadership skills, and cooperation with others” (“Facts,” n.d., para. 6).

Over the last 108 years, GSUSA has continuously introduced more leadership opportunities for girls and empowered girls to pursue the goals they set for themselves. In addition to badges, GSUSA also offers National Leadership Journeys which dive deeper into issues that girls of different age levels deal with (High-Pippert, 2015). According to High-Pippert (2015), the Journey books focus on “particular aspects of leadership development,” including “being powerful, taking action, and being part of a movement” (p. 139). These messages of leadership are important for girls to receive at every age level, as they help girls identify their own autonomy and understand they are individually and collectively powerful (High-Pippert, 2015).
According to the 2007 publication of “Exploring Girls’ Leadership,” which is a research review by the Girl Scout Research Institute, GSUSA takes a youth leadership approach. The document explains that this approach “advocates for youth to become active participants and learners with a focus on the positive skills, attitudes, and behaviors centered on civic involvement and personal goal setting” (Schoenberg & Salmond, 2007, p. 6). This approach challenges common misperceptions of youth leadership and civic engagement by making youth active participants in their own development (Schoenberg & Salmond, 2007). The youth leadership approach: (1) empowers youth “to take on increasing responsibility through active participation in decision-making and civic involvement”; (2) considers youth “involved participants in designing and implementing activities”; and (3) looks “at the impact they have today, not just as adults tomorrow” (Schoenberg & Salmond, 2007, pp. 6-7).

GSUSA’s communicated dedication to empowering all girls and helping them take an active role in their own leadership development takes the organization’s value of diversity and inclusion one step further. While it is important that GSUSA celebrates diversity and inclusion within local and global communities, empowering diverse girls and providing them with leadership opportunities actively equips them to take action for themselves. Empowering and equipping girls with the information, skills and motivation required to succeed in today’s society regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and ability challenges systems of white supremacy and patriarchy.

Systems of white supremacy and patriarchy are challenged because GSUSA does not communicate support for the gender expectations placed on girls and instead empowers girls to make decisions for themselves. All of this is possible because girls have a “girls-only ‘safe
space” where they feel comfortable to confide in certain adults and other girls (Schoenberg & Salmond, 2007, p. 14). In the girls-only setting available to Girl Scouts, “they feel safe to talk about issues they wouldn’t necessarily talk about with boys, try out new activities without a fear of failure, and experience less pressure to look or act a certain way” (Schoenberg & Salmond, 2007, p. 14).

Thus far, the researcher has provided evidence from scholarly literature, GSUSA’s website, and GSUSA’s publications to support the argument that GSUSA communicates values that align with a feminist perspective. The national organization portrays such values by communicating messages that challenge imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. However, a gap in the literature exists. There are over 100 local Girl Scout councils across the United States (“Facts,” n.d.), making it nearly impossible for the national organization to ensure their desired messages are reaching girls in every setting or region. This introduces the question of message alignment within GSUSA and if GSUSA’s communicated messages at the national level are being communicated clearly and consistently at the local level. The following section provides a definition of message alignment and explores the topic of message alignment within GSUSA.

**Message Alignment**

In the present study, message alignment refers to the consistency between messages communicated to various organizational publics. The researcher uses “messages” as a general term to describe the specific values, ideas, and themes communicated by an organization to its audiences. The researcher’s definition of message alignment is based on Smikle’s (2002) definition of overall organizational alignment, which is “the congruence, the intentional
congruence, between goals, functions and activities” within an organization (p. 27). According to Smikle (2002), when the alignment between “strategic intent” and “operational reality” is strong, “values are congruent and people share the purpose and values of the organization” (p. 27). Message inconsistency communicates unclear messages, which can be perceived by stakeholders as hypocrisy (Smikle, 2002). On the other hand, when communicated messages are clear and consistent, stakeholders understand the organization’s values and can therefore identify more strongly with them. For organizations who aim to help or empower a group of individuals, enlisting employees who believe in that goal is necessary. However, an organization that does not communicate messages internally that are consistent with external messages does not exhibit clear values (Smikle, 2002).

GSUSA is of particular interest to this study due to its extensive history as an organization that promotes female empowerment. As detailed earlier in this chapter, GSUSA communicates values that challenge imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. The values communicated by GSUSA that challenge these four constructs include serving girls, support for all abilities, acceptance of all cultures, importance of diversity and inclusion, empowerment, and leadership. These values are communicated by GSUSA to its external publics, which include Girl Scout members, prospective Girl Scout members, Girl Scout families, and other girls and young women. It is important for GSUSA to communicate messages to internal publics (employees, volunteers, seasonal staff, etc.) that align with the messages communicated to external publics in order to exhibit clear values and effectively achieve their goal of female empowerment.
The organization provides a plethora of resources on countless subjects to parents, volunteers, and councils; and most of these resources focus on communicating GSUSA’s national messages/values at the local level. There are many avenues for communicating GSUSA’s messages to girls, such as within troop meetings and outings, events such as World Thinking Day and Day at the Capitol, the Girl Scout Cookie Program, summer camp, and more. While each of these avenues is important, looking at every avenue is beyond the scope of this project. Therefore, this project focuses narrowly on the messages that are communicated within the camp environment.

Most of the information about camp programs is provided on local Girl Scout councils’ individual websites, and GSUSA’s national website only provides an overview of what may be included in attending Girl Scout camp. The national website describes Girl Scout camp as offering the following positive experiences: escaping our “world of screens” by getting outdoors, developing outdoor skills, gaining a deep appreciation for nature, and building leadership skills (“Camp and Outdoors,” n.d.). Additionally, attending Girl Scout camp can provide girls with unique opportunities to try new things, such as horseback riding, rock climbing, archery, ziplining, and ropes courses (“Camp and Outdoors,” n.d.).

While GSUSA’s website does not provide detailed information on camp programs, it does emphasize the role of attending camp in fostering campers’ personal development and appreciation of the outdoors. The national website explains, “Whether for a day, a week, or longer, Girl Scout camp gives girls an opportunity to grow, explore, and have fun under the guidance of caring, trained adults (“Camp and Outdoors,” n.d., para. 4). There is very little research that looks at message alignment in the camp setting, yet it is a setting in which Girl
Scout councils have direct contact and direct influence on girls and young women. It is important to look at the Girl Scout camp setting to study message alignment within GSUSA due to the dynamics between campers and camp staff – two important stakeholders in the Girl Scout camp environment.

Campers are important stakeholders because they receive messages directly from Girl Scout employees while attending camp, and they receive those messages through various activities unique to the camp experience. The messages they receive are indicative of how organizational values translate at the local level. To identify the messages communicated to campers, the first research question asks:

RQ1: What messages do Girl Scout camp staff send to campers?

Camp staff are also important stakeholders, as they are the “caring, trained adults” who provide “guidance” to campers (“Camp and Outdoors,” n.d., para. 4). Camp staff are responsible for communicating organizational values to campers and ensuring the organization’s goals are being met at the local level. Therefore, in addition to focusing on the messages that are sent to campers, this study is also interested in the messages that camp staff receive. To identify the messages communicated to camp staff, the second research question asks:

RQ2: What messages are communicated to and between Girl Scout camp staff members?

This study is also interested in two aspects of organizational message alignment. First, this study is interested in understanding the extent to which there is alignment between the messages communicated at the national level and the local level. Second, this study is interested in understanding the extent to which there is alignment between the messages communicated to campers and the messages communicated to camp staff. Therefore, the third research question
has three parts to understand the relationship between messages communicated by GSUSA, messages communicated to campers, and messages communicated to camp staff. The third researcher question asks:

RQ3(a): To what extent do the messages communicated by Girl Scout camp staff to campers align with the feminist values present in GSUSA messaging?

RQ3(b): To what extent do the messages communicated to and between Girl Scout camp staff members align with the feminist values present in GSUSA messaging?

RQ3(c): To what extent do the messages communicated to campers align with the messages communicated to and between camp staff?

Overall, this study seeks to evaluate message alignment within the Girl Scout camp setting by comparing the messages that campers (an external public) receive to the messages camp staff (an internal public) receive. Since camp staff are responsible for guiding campers in their camp experience and personal development, it is important for staff to communicate values to campers that align with GSUSA’s values. Whether camp staff receive messages that align with GSUSA’s communicated values may affect their personal experiences working for the organization and how well they can communicate GSUSA’s intended values to campers.

Preview of Chapters

The first chapter of this study reviewed pertinent organizational details about GSUSA and utilized hooks’ (2015) definition of feminism to examine GSUSA’s present messaging. The four constructs challenged by feminism (imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy) were applied to GSUSA’s messaging to evaluate the feminist nature of the organization’s communicated messages. The chapter concluded with a description of message
alignment, the importance of message alignment between messages communicated to internal and external publics, and the relevance of message alignment to the present study.

Chapter 2 will outline the methods used to collect and analyze data in this study. The second chapter will include a rationale for the research design, details about participants, an explanation of the study procedures, and information about the data set included in this study. Chapter 3 will provide the results of data collection by discussing themes established by the researcher; and Chapter 4 will be a discussion of the results.
Chapter 2

METHOD

Rationale for Research Design

This thesis seeks to understand the alignment or unalignment between messages communicated to campers and staff members at Girl Scout camps. To do so, the researcher conducted qualitative interviews with Girl Scout camp staff members to discuss their perceptions of messaging at camp. Qualitative interviewing was chosen as the main method for this study because interviews are flexible, and the data collected “is based on participants’ interpretations of their experiences and is expressed in their own words, using the jargon and speech styles that are meaningful to them” (Daymon & Holloway, 2011, p. 221). The use of interviews to collect data in this study gave the researcher the opportunity to talk with participants about their experiences working at a Girl Scout camp and to understand their perceptions of the messages communicated to campers and staff members.

The researcher chose to study message alignment within the camp setting specifically because it is a unique workplace environment. Camp staff members are seasonal employees, working only through the summer. As Ashcraft and Kedrowicz (2002) note, seasonal employees are examples of organizational members who possess “alternative membership contracts,” making their workplace needs and experiences different from a typical work environment (p. 88). Additionally, working at summer camps can be extremely taxing on one’s mental and physical health depending on individual camps’ facilities and expectations of staff members. The
camp setting may present challenges that are not typical of a standard work environment and therefore may present unique challenges for staff members with intersecting identities. These challenges may pertain to communication and relationships between staff members, physical or mental barriers, or discrimination and bias.

The researcher chose to focus on the messages communicated to campers and staff members within the Girl Scout camp setting because staff act as the messengers of GSUSA’s values to campers. While attending Girl Scout camp, campers receive all direct communication from camp staff; and camp staff are therefore representing the national organization. Whether there is alignment between GSUSA’s messaging, the messages communicated to campers, and the messages communicated to staff members will determine if the national organization’s goals and values are making it into the camp setting.

Participants

Fifteen participants were interviewed for this study. All participants were Caucasian. Thirteen identified as cisgender women, meaning their gender identity aligns with the female sex assigned to them at birth. One participant identified as non-binary using they/them pronouns, and one identified as trans (female to male). Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 49 years of age with an average of 23.9 years of age. Ten participants identified themselves as middle class, two participants identified themselves as lower-middle class, and three participants identified themselves as upper-middle class.

Out of the fifteen participants interviewed, all but one was a Girl Scout during childhood. Nine participants were Girl Scouts through most of their childhood, and the remaining five
participants who engaged in Girl Scouting during their childhood did so for a varying number of years (one, two, five, six, six, and eight years).

All fifteen participants previously worked at one or more Girl Scout camps, and the number of years of their employment ranged from one to ten years. On average, participants had 3.7 years of prior experience working at one or more Girl Scout camps when interviewed in this study. Four participants were employed at Girl Scout camps for only one year; three participants were employed for two years; three participants were employed for three years; one participant was employed for four years; one participant was employed for nine years; and one participant was employed for ten years. The final fifteenth participant worked directly in a Girl Scout camp setting like the other participants for five years but has continued to work in executive, supervisory roles over the camps in her Girl Scout council. Her experience working with Girl Scout camps amounts to thirteen years.

Design

Qualitative interviews were utilized to collect data for this study. Specifically, the researcher conducted semi-structured life world interviews. This type of interview attempts to “obtain descriptions of the interviewee’s lived world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of described phenomena” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 31). Semi-structured life world interviews were chosen for data collection in this study because they are professional yet conversational (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). They encourage an open dialogue about the interviewee’s experiences in relation to the discussed phenomenon, which is organizational message alignment within Girl Scout camps (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This type of
qualitative interview kept the focus on interviewees’ perceptions and limited the researcher’s influence over participant responses.

The semi-structured life world interview resembles an everyday conversation while following a written guide that keeps the interview focused (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This written guide, the interview protocol, helps the researcher ensure all necessary topics are being discussed and questions are asked in a professional, understandable way (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In semi-structured interviews, the interview protocol is not strictly followed. Instead, there is a balance between professionalism and a conversational feel (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). As the interview is conducted, the researcher pays close attention to answers provided by the interviewee and allows the interview to flow freely based on topics most important to the interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). However, the researcher makes sure to cover the topics that are most important to answering the research questions and therefore does not allow the interview to get so far off track that the discussion is no longer pertinent to the study.

Textual Analysis

The development of the interview protocol was based on a textual analysis of official Girl Scout documents and web pages from the local councils included in this study. Since the researcher’s goal was to understand message alignment between messages communicated to campers and messages communicated to staff members, she needed the interview protocol to include informed questions that would effectively address communication to both audiences. Additionally, since the researcher was interested in analyzing message alignment through a feminist lens, she needed to understand if the feminist messages communicated by GSUSA in
print and online documents (explored in Chapter 1) were echoed in local councils’ print and online documents.

At the beginning of the study, prior even to submitting the IRB application, the researcher conducted the textual analysis on official Girl Scout materials to gain a preliminary understanding of the messages communicated to Girl Scouts before they arrive at camp. These “official” materials included council-distributed camp documents, council web pages about camp, and information provided on various Girl Scout web pages. The specific materials included in the textual analysis were as follows: two published camp documents containing information about Girl Scout camp in the summer of 2020, representing the two individual councils included in this study; camp information provided on both of the included councils’ web pages; and information provided on the national organization’s website pertaining to GSUSA’s goals and values related to camp and outdoor programming.

The definition of the feminist movement and the four constructs it challenges (imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy) discussed in the literature review were applied to all materials. The purpose of conducting this initial textual analysis was to decipher if the feminist messages communicated by the national organization were present in the councils’ messaging about camp in their regions. The researcher found that the feminist messages communicated by GSUSA to its members (identified in Chapter 1) were also communicated by the two individual Girl Scout councils in their published camp documents.

Analyzing texts and other media is a useful supplemental tool when conducting interviews, as it can uncover how “a group of stakeholders or an organization views its past and present actions, achievements and social interactions” (Daymon & Holloway, 2011, p. 277).
Conducting the textual analysis before conducting interviews ensured the researcher was asking useful questions that related to feminist theory. The textual analysis cannot be included in this paper as it would reveal identifying information about the councils included in this study; however, the researcher used the information provided by the preliminary textual analysis to develop a thorough interview protocol that included questions pertinent to message alignment and the four constructs challenged by feminism.

**Interview Protocol**

The researcher developed the interview protocol based on the information discovered in the textual analysis. The interview protocol utilized throughout this study (See Appendix B) had six sections, including an introduction, conclusion, and four sections that contained questions: Demographic Information, Messages Communicated to Campers, Messages Communicated to Staff Members, and Staff Relationships and Communication. The Demographic Information section included questions about participants’ demographics relevant to the interests of this study. Since the concept of intersectionality is important to understanding employees’ experiences and perceptions, the researcher made sure to ask questions that covered many different aspects of an individual’s identity, such as years of involvement with Girl Scouts, age, ethnic identification, gender identification, socioeconomic class, and invisible diversity. This gave the researcher insight on why participants may have similar or different perceptions of working at a Girl Scout camp.

The Messages Communicated to Campers section contained questions that sought to understand what messages are communicated to Girl Scout campers and how those messages are communicated. The questions encouraged participants to explore their perceptions of the
messages communicated to campers, which messages and values are most important, and the role they personally played in communicating those messages to campers. This section also contained questions about diversity among campers and the camps’ efforts to promote diversity among campers. The questions included in this section of the interview protocol were intended to address RQ1 and RQ 3(a) by exploring how the messages communicated to campers relate to the four constructs. RQ1 and RQ3(a) asked, “What messages do Girl Scout camp staff send to campers,” and, “To what extent do the messages communicated to Girl Scout campers align with the feminist values present in GSUSA messaging,” respectively.

The Messages Communicated to Staff Members section explored participants’ perceptions of the messages communicated to them and their coworkers. This section of the interview protocol asked general questions about messages communicated to staff members as well as specific questions that encouraged participants to think of the subtle messages sent by different employees’ actions. There were nine main questions included that addressed cultural imperialism, three main questions that addressed white supremacy, one question that addressed capitalism, and seven questions that addressed patriarchy. Participants were not informed that certain questions addressed different constructs. Rather, the questions were written in a way that helped participants explore specific aspects of how the four constructs could be challenged or not challenged in a camp environment. The questions included in this section were intended to help the researcher answer RQ2 and RQ3(b). RQ2 asked, “What messages are communicated to and between staff members?” RQ3(b) asked, “To what extent do the messages communicated to and between staff members align with the feminist values present in GSUSA messaging?”
The Staff Relationships and Communication section was included in the interview protocol for the researcher to learn about the camp setting as a specific work environment with unique social dynamics. The researcher wanted to understand through this section how Girl Scout camp staff members interact with one another and the effects of staff relationships on overall work experience. This section was incredibly important, as it drew out personal experiences and accounts of the interviewees rather than potentially scripted or rehearsed information about the organization. The purpose of this section was to understand the effects that participants’ social experiences within a camp setting had on their overall perceptions of the messages they received. This section, along with the previous section of Messages Communicated to Staff Members, helped the researcher answer RQ2 and RQ3(b). All sections of the interview protocol that contained questions helped the researcher answer RQ3(c), which asked, “To what extent do the messages communicated to campers align with the messages communicated to and between camp staff?”

Procedures

Once the researcher received IRB approval, the researcher recruited participants for the study. To recruit participants, individuals with previous experience as Girl Scout campers or Girl Scout camp staff members were contacted via email, text or social media with a description of the study and a request for participation. The researcher knows each of the participants personally, although the degree of closeness with each person varies. The researcher has worked alongside twelve of the participants directly but has not worked with three of the participants. Of these remaining three participants, two were the researcher’s campers several years ago, and one has held an executive supervisory role over all camps within one council in which the researcher
was previously employed. The individuals who participated in this study were contacted due to their experiences as Girl Scout campers and/or Girl Scout camp staff. The researcher attempted to include individuals with different personalities, belief systems, and attitudes toward their employment experiences in order to receive diverse opinions and perceptions.

Interviews were conducted with all fifteen participants who each gave consent to be interviewed and audio recorded. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced unique challenges to collecting consent and conducting interviews, but the researcher adapted to the situation. The consent form (See Appendix A) was emailed to all individuals who communicated interest in participating when initially contacted. Participants were given the option to sign the consent form electronically since many did not have access to a printer.

Interviews were conducted over video calls since the stay-at-home order kept the researcher from meeting with participants in person. The researcher used a variety of platforms to meet with participants, such as Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom. Google Hangouts was quickly identified as being the easiest to use for the purposes of this study. At the start of each interview, before the researcher began recording, the researcher discussed the purpose of the study and reviewed the consent form with participants. The researcher made sure each participant understood confidentiality and their rights as participants (freedom to end the interview at any time or refrain from answering a question). The researcher also asked participants if they still wished to participate in the study, and none had changed their minds.

Each interview was audio-recorded with the researcher’s phone, uploaded to Otter.ai (an online transcription service), and then deleted from the researcher’s phone. The interviews were initially transcribed through Otter.ai, but the researcher went through and edited transcripts to
ensure accuracy. Once interviews were transcribed, the researcher deleted the audio recordings and transcripts from the automated transcription program.

**Data Analysis**

**Data Set**

The data set consists of interviews with fifteen participants. Interviews ranged from 31 to 79 minutes in length, and the average length of interviews was 56.5 minutes. The audio-recording of each interview was uploaded to an automated transcription service soon after the interview was conducted. Interview transcription involved a verbatim account of everything the participants and researcher said while recorded. The researcher did not keep detailed notes of pauses, intonation, or other vocal expressions in transcriptions. Transcription resulted in approximately 256 pages of single-spaced text in Cambria, 11-point font.

**Analysis of Data**

A thematic analysis was conducted on each interview after they were transcribed. The thematic analysis was informed by the feminist analysis the researcher conducted on GSUSA’s communicated messages in Chapter 1. Thematic analysis was chosen as the data analysis technique for this study due to its flexibility and support of rich description (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (p. 79). A theme is a patterned response that “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). When conducting a thematic analysis, the researcher must first decide what counts as a theme, which is a question of prevalence (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To identify the prevalence of themes,
the researcher must consider their frequency ("number of times they appeared"), extensiveness ("their emergence across different texts"), and intensity ("the degree of depth") (Brummett & Steuber, 2015, p. 28).

Six phases, presented by Braun and Clarke (2006), were followed in order to complete the thematic analysis. The six phases include: (1) becoming familiar with the data, reading through transcripts multiple times, and taking notes on the transcripts; (2) generating initial codes; (3) sorting codes into potential themes, which involves a preliminary analysis of codes to brainstorm overarching themes; (4) reviewing and refining themes, then considering the validity and accuracy of established themes to the data sets; (5) defining and naming themes; and finally, (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A thematic analysis was the best data analysis technique for this study, as it kept the researcher from applying her own experiences and prior understanding of the Girl Scout camp environment to the results. Considering the personal relationships that existed between the researcher and participants, it was best to utilize a data analysis technique that was flexible and helped limit bias before information was collected.

**Research Questions #1 and #2.**

To address the first two research questions, the researcher utilized the method of thematic analysis described above. The first two research questions ask:

RQ1: What messages do Girl Scout camp staff send to campers?

RQ2: What messages are communicated to and between Girl Scout camp staff members?

The researcher used Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six steps of thematic analysis and focused extensively on reading carefully through transcripts multiple times. First, the researcher became familiar with the data by personally combing through and carefully editing the transcriptions that
were created by the automated transcription service. This gave the researcher the opportunity to become familiar with the data. After interviews were transcribed, the researcher highlighted and took notes on printed copies while re-reading them. By becoming familiar with the data by reading through transcripts multiple times and taking notes on the transcripts, the researcher applied Braun and Clarke’s (2006) first step of thematic analysis to the study.

From the notes taken on transcripts, the researcher generated initial codes, applying the second step of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis. The researcher identified initial codes by recognizing terms and concepts used frequently by participants in their individual interviews. For example, one of the initial codes identified by the researcher was “acceptance.” While reading through the transcript of Participant 1’s interview, the researcher noticed that Participant 1 talked about acceptance on multiple occasions. At one point, Participant 1 stated, “So obviously, everybody we hire on is not going to be as accepting. They’re not going to be as open-minded as the majority of other people may be” (1:536-539). Later, Participant 1 explained, “There are definitely personalities that do not mix on staff sometimes. And so that does affect how accepting people will be because it does get cliquey sometimes, which I am learning is just part of life” (1:555-558). Since both sentences mentioned acceptance, the researcher coded them as “acceptance.” Other initial codes generated by the researcher included inclusivity; diversity; camp culture; camp “magic”; home culture; the Girl Scout mission statement; leadership; empowerment; “girl-led” activities; gossip; shunning; clashing opinions; and courage, confidence, and character.

The researcher applied Braun and Clarke’s (2006) third step of thematic analysis by sorting codes into potential themes. For example, inclusivity and acceptance were concepts
discussed frequently by participants in similar contexts and were often used interchangeably. The researcher decided all quotes coded as “inclusivity” or “acceptance” would fit into the theme of “inclusivity.”

Next, the researcher applied Braun and Clarke’s (2006) fourth step of thematic analysis, which involved narrowing down themes as each interview was conducted and transcribed. Once all interviews had been conducted, transcribed, and coded, the researcher refined potential themes and sorted them by the research question they answered. The researcher then applied Braun and Clarke’s (2006) fifth step of thematic analysis by defining and naming themes. The result of steps four and five of the thematic analysis resulted in five defined themes: empowerment, leadership, personal development, inclusivity, and individuality and self-expression. These themes were sorted by the research question they addressed. The researcher identified empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity as addressing both Research Questions #1 and #2. Personal development was identified as addressing Research Question #1, and individuality and self-expression was identified as addressing Research Question #2.

**Research Question #3.**

The third research question consisted of three sub-questions pertaining to message alignment within GSUSA. The third research question asks:

RQ3(a): To what extent do the messages communicated by Girl Scout camp staff to campers align with the feminist values present in GSUSA messaging?

RQ3(b): To what extent do the messages communicated to and between Girl Scout camp staff members align with the feminist values present in GSUSA messaging?
RQ3(c): To what extent do the messages communicated to campers align with the messages communicated to and between camp staff?

The researcher addressed Research Question #3 by analyzing the results of Research Questions #1 and #2 and comparing those results to the messaging of GSUSA. Message alignment was identified as present when GSUSA communicated values aligned with stakeholders’ actual experiences.

To answer RQ3(a), the researcher compared the results of RQ1 (messages communicated to campers) to the feminist values present in GSUSA messaging. To answer RQ3(b), the researcher compared the results of RQ2 (messages communicated to and between staff) to the feminist values present in GSUSA messaging. Finally, the researcher answered RQ3(c) by comparing the results of RQ1 (messages communicated to camper) to the results of RQ2 (messages communicated to and between camp staff). Once every research question was addressed, the researcher applied the final, sixth step of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) by reporting the findings of the analysis in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Summary

This chapter has provided a description of the methods used in this study. First, the rationale for the selected design was explained. Next, details about participants and their demographics were provided. Then, the design of the semi-structured life world interviews conducted in this study was outlined, and the procedures of the preliminary textual analysis and subsequent interviews was detailed. Finally, the data set included in this study and the form of data utilized at the conclusion of this study was described.
Chapter 3

RESULTS

The goal of this study was to assess message alignment within GSUSA by determining if the feminist messages communicated by GSUSA are present within a camp setting and communicated to both Girl Scout campers and Girl Scout camp staff members. Three research questions were developed to pursue this goal, and the results are provided in this chapter. The results are organized by research question. Each theme identified by the researcher is explained within the research question it addresses. Council, camp, and participant names have been removed to ensure confidentiality, and they/them pronouns are used when needed to describe each participant. Interviews are cited throughout this section in the following format: (Transcript #:lines). For the sake of readability, fillers and repeated words have been removed from participants’ quotes.

Research Question #1

The first research question asked: What messages do Girl Scout camp staff send to campers? The researcher identified four themes related to the first research question after interviewing all fifteen participants. The four themes include empowerment, leadership, personal development, and inclusivity.
Empowerment

Empowerment was identified in Chapter 1 as being a dominant, inherently feminist message communicated by GSUSA to its members. Participants also expressed that they see empowerment as one of the most valuable messages communicated to Girl Scouts while attending camp. Participant 12 perceived empowerment as an important message communicated to campers in relation to the academic/professional fields they want to pursue, explaining how necessary it is for young girls to know they can achieve anything. Participant 12 stated:

A main [message] is just empowerment, and girls can do anything that they set their mind to. And if people talk down about, like, what they want to do in their future, they can just ignore that and keep going and be in STEM or whatever type of – I guess job or life – they want to achieve. (12:38-42)

When asked why empowerment stands out to them as an important message communicated to campers, Participant 12 explained, “Having an organization that encourages people to do what they want, and they can succeed if they put their mind to it - it’s just really impactful” (12:48-50). Participant 12 felt personally connected to the organization due to its emphasis on empowering young individuals.

Participant 6 also identified empowerment as the most important message communicated to Girl Scout campers, and they felt like empowerment was important due to their personal life experiences:

[Empowerment] stands out as important to me because I feel like in my life, you know, there’s been a lot of times where I’ve needed empowerment in order to get through my life, especially someone who was raised as female before transitioning. So you know, I know what it’s like to want female empowerment to some extent, and just watching other girls get that I think is really important as well. (6:61-67)

Both Participant 6 and Participant 12 were able to see empowerment as an important message communicated to campers because they understood the role of empowerment in their own lives.
They knew the young campers needed to be empowered because participants, as adults, also needed empowerment throughout their lives.

Within the overall message of empowerment, independence and strength were specific characteristics that participants believed campers were empowered to develop. Participant 8 explained how campers are encouraged to be strong and independent women, stating that campers often realize, “Hey, I am independent, and I can do outdoorsy stuff, just like anybody else would be able to do” (8:65-66). Participant 8 experienced campers making this realization on several occasions but described one of them in detail:

[Campers felt independent] especially during that week that those girls lived at camp with no power and no running water. That was truly roughing it, and I think that, you know, situations like that really bring out that…I don’t know, I guess you could say bravery in a girl. (8:66-70)

Campers realized in that challenging week how strong and brave they were because they were confronted with a new, unique situation that forced them to adapt.

Participant 15 described strength as a value emphasized by the national organization that is also ever-present within the camp setting. They perceived the purpose of the organization to be creating “strong women and strong leaders” (15:55); and they saw this promoted in the camp setting in various ways:

We didn’t always focus on outdoor education. Sometimes we focused on crafts, sometimes we focused on really serious topics like demographics and race and inequality. It was really empowering to teach the girls everyone’s background but also how to use their own. (15:57-60)

By facilitating a range of activities and encouraging discussions about demographics, race, and inequality, Participant 15 felt that their camp helped develop girls into the strong women and strong leaders that GSUSA hoped to develop.
Leadership

Leadership was another feminist message described in Chapter 1 as communicated by GSUSA; and the researcher identified leadership as a theme relevant to the first research question. Participants discussed leadership development as one of the most important messages communicated to Girl Scouts while attending camps. Participants also explained how most of the activities offered at camp serve the purpose of developing leadership skills in campers.

Participant 15 stated, “I think this strong sense of leadership was something that we really put forward, and a sense of self. We really focused on personalized goals, personalized leadership plans” (15:42-44). According to Participant 15, a goal of the camp they worked at was encouraging campers to develop leadership qualities that align with campers’ individual strengths and personalities. Camp staff members tried to help campers understand that everyone can be a leader; and just because someone is quiet or shy does not mean they are not capable of being a leader. As an example, Participant 15 mentioned a personality test that staff members and older campers took to determine what kind of personality traits they exhibit while working on a project:

We used something called the bird test where we took different aspects [of personalities] and kind of categorized them. But some people fell in the middle, and it kind of helped identify that people don’t necessarily fall into four categories, but these are generalizations. You can be [two different birds], and I thought that was really awesome. (15:44-49)

Participant 15’s camp used the personality test to help campers understand how to work well together and establish goals that were in line with their strengths and weaknesses.

Participant 2 explained how leadership stood out to them as an important message communicated to campers because it has a lasting impact on campers’ lives:
They might come to camp and do something fun, like they might go horseback riding or do archery or go swimming. And they’re going to have fun, and they’re going to remember the fun that they have. But I think the lasting impact [camp] has on them is going to be those values of the courage, confidence, and character and being a leader that sometimes they don’t even realize that they got. (2:60-67)

Through all activities, campers are encouraged to think of themselves as leaders and further develop their leadership skills. Even though some activities offer more of a fun experience rather than deep personal development, camp staff are always finding ways to encourage leadership development that will have a lasting impact on campers.

**Personal Development**

The third theme identified by the researcher as relevant to the first research question is personal development. Personal development was communicated directly and indirectly by participants when describing the activities offered at Girl Scout camp and the reasoning behind offering those activities. Several participants mentioned how important it is for campers to try new things in order to grow as individuals and as leaders. Participant 14 stated, “We want girls to have the opportunity to grow and try new things and not worry about what anybody else thinks” (14:62-63). They described “girls having the opportunity to try new things and see what kind of skill or activities/interests” they enjoy as the most important message communicated to campers – second only to safety, since campers must be in a safe environment to challenge themselves (14:64-65).

Additionally, multiple participants (2, 11, 13) cited GSUSA’s mission statement when discussing the messages communicated to Girl Scouts at camp. GSUSA’s mission is “to build girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place” (“Who We Are,” n.d., para. 4). Participant 11 explained how values included in the Girl Scout mission statement
“really do build the courage, confidence, and character that we really strive to implement in all of our camps and what everybody should try to implement in their lives” (11:59-61). Participant 2 explained how Girl Scout camps offer a lot of different activities, but the Girl Scout mission ties everything together:

Those are things that, you know, they’re going to need when they go to college or start a career or start a family. All those sorts of things, all the different challenges you face in life, and you need the confidence to take them on and the courageousness to take them on. (2:70-74)

Participant 2 emphasized the personal development Girl Scouts experience at camp and how that development equips them for challenges they will face later in life. Courage, confidence, and character are personal qualities taken from GSUSA’s mission statement and relayed directly to campers. In communicating the value of courage, confidence, and character to campers, staff members express the importance of personal development and growth. Campers learn that growing into “respectful” individuals who are “responsible for others and for one’s own actions” is a necessary part of being an active member in society (13:52, 53).

Overall, participants portrayed the role of camp activities and trying new things as impactful to the personal development of campers. Participants emphasized GSUSA’s mission statement as being essential to the mission of Girl Scout summer camps. It was clear that camp staff members placed importance on seeing campers grow, whether staff only interacted with a camper for a week or saw a returning camper grow over several summers.

**Inclusivity**

The final theme identified by the researcher as relevant to the first research question is inclusivity. Participants frequently stressed the importance of making camp an accepting environment that is inclusive for all campers. Participant 7 explained how, in the time they
worked at a Girl Scout camp, they learned a lot about how to portray acceptance to campers. Participant 7 stated, “We spoke a lot about acceptance of who they were. That no matter what their outside world was, Girl Scouts, and the Girl Scout counselors and the staff, accepted them and cared for them. No matter what” (7:40-43).

Additionally, Participant 7 learned how to take an active role in helping campers work through emotions and personal problems when needed. Participant 7 explained the support she often gave campers, saying to them, “I’m sorry that you go through this outside of camp. Camp is a safe place. We love you, we accept you, we’re here for you” (7:46-48). Similarly, Participant 8 discussed the message of acceptance they personally tried to communicate to campers, showing campers, “Hey, you have value. You’re worthy enough to do stuff that anybody else can do” (8:55-56).

One topic discussed in each interview was the response a transgender individual would receive if they requested to attend camp. Even though some participants were unsure of specific rules and how their council would respond, all participants expressed the acceptance and welcoming environment a transgender individual would receive from staff members if allowed to attend camp. Listed below are some of the specific responses to “What response do you believe a transgender girl would receive if she requested to attend your camp?”:

I believe that they would be met with a positive response. In terms of Girl Scouts, from what I remember, if you identify as female then you can attend camp. And I think the girls were understanding and very willing to accept everyone. So, I think that if a transgender girl decided to go to camp, she would have a good experience. (7:127-131)

They would be allowed in. Camp is really an inclusive place, especially [the camp I worked at]. And so, it’s just a good place to be for anybody who feels comfortable being there. (11:105-108)
I feel like we would be very open about it. Just because Girl Scouts is welcoming to everyone. Um, it’s really hard because we’ve never experienced it. Like I know personally I would, and I think everyone else at camp would be too. (10:96-99)

Participant 14 was able to articulate the specific rules of their council due to the executive position they held. Participant 14 initially responded, “We’ve actually had some parents call and ask about that. And we are definitely willing to work through that with the parents and make accommodations. We do not have an issue with that” (14:121-123). When asked for clarifications on the guidelines provided by the participant’s council, Participant 14 explained:

What we require is that…so, we’re Girl Scouts. So, what they identify as is what we take as a girl. If parents identify the child as a girl, the girl identifies as a girl, then that is what we take into consideration. If somebody identifies as a boy, and they are a boy, we don’t serve boys in Girl Scouts. Only adult men that are helping be volunteers or working at camps in the kitchen, or whatever that might be. (14:133-139)

The clarifications provided by Participant 14 were incredibly helpful, as many participants did not know what the specific guidelines were for transgender individuals attending camp or working at camp. However, even when participants did not know the specific rules, they still believed staff members would be welcoming of transgender campers and treat them equally to other campers.

**Research Question #2**

The second research question asked: What messages are communicated to and between staff members? Through interviews, the researcher identified four themes as addressing this question. The four themes include empowerment, leadership, inclusivity, and individuality and self-expression.
Empowerment

Overall, participants felt empowered in their role as staff members. However, many participants expressed mixed feelings about the extent of this empowerment. Participants understood their importance to the experiences and personal development of campers because council employees and supervisors frequently emphasized it. Knowing how important they were to the campers’ lives made participants feel empowered at times; however, they did not think of themselves as empowered consistently. Some participants mentioned empowerment explicitly when asked about the general messages communicated to them by their council. Empowerment was also a specific topic introduced late in interviews by the researcher. In each interview, participants were asked, “When you hear the word empowerment, what do you think of?” After participants answered this question and explored what empowerment personally means to them, they were asked if they felt empowered as a staff member.

One participant who expressed mixed feelings about empowerment was Participant 3 who described empowerment as “loving yourself and knowing what you can do. And also, like, empowering other people to know that they can do whatever they want to do if they set their mind to it” (3:599-601). When asked if they personally feel empowered while working at camp, they replied:

Kind of. I feel like, again, it depends on the day, depends on the week, summer. Because I know the first summer, yeah. Most of the time. But the second summer, no. Because I feel like the admin staff was just basically telling us what to do and not actually empowering us. (3:606-609)

Throughout the interview with Participant 3, they expressed a lot of concerns about how staff members treated each other and how conflict was handled during their last summer of working at
Participant 3 explained that ultimately, whether staff are empowered or not “depends on the group of people working there and how they want to run it” (3:610-611).

These feelings were echoed by Participant 6 who said they felt empowered at times but not all the time. They described empowerment as “being able to do anything” and talked about how empowerment connects to ideas of femininity and occupation (6:719):

You can be a very feminine person and be empowered by that. But you can also be like, an androgynous, masculine person and be empowered by that. You can be a teacher and be empowered by that, or you could be an engineer and be empowered by that. And it doesn’t matter what it is you choose to be or do. It’s just, what you want to do, you’re able to be who you want to be, unapologetically. (6:723-730)

When asked if they felt empowered while working at camp, Participant 6 replied, “Sometimes. Sometimes. Definitely not around the end there. I felt like I was hiding myself because, you know, I couldn’t quite be what I wanted to be” (6:734-736). Similarly, when Participant 15 was asked if they felt empowered in their role as a camp staff member, they said “it would vary” (15:387). Participant 15 explained:

It depended on, really a variety of aspects. Some days I was like, ‘This is great. I’m feeling so supported. I’m feeling empowered by everyone.’ And some days I was like, ‘I’m grumpy, and I don’t like admin right now, and we are in this conflict.’ So some days it was good, some days it was bad. (15:387-392)

Further, Participant 15 specified what made them feel empowered on the good days. They explained, “Positive reinforcement was really useful for me in particular. The sense of, ‘I can do all these great things and be acknowledged’ really made me feel like I was supported and empowered to do my own things” (15:395-398). Participant 15 did not feel empowered on days when they received “unconstructive criticism – just criticism for the sake of it” (15:401).

Even though mixed feelings of empowerment were communicated throughout interviews, there were participants who felt empowered more frequently. Participant 13 described
empowerment as “the ability to express oneself and to feel comfortable and accepted in doing so” (13:623-624). When asked if they felt empowered while working at Girl Scout camp, they responded:

I definitely did. I mean there, there were points and specific incidents where I didn’t, and I felt like they could have been handled better. But overall, I look back on my experience as camp staff regardless of what position I was in as one where, not only was I learning how to empower myself and handle a whole variety of situations, but I was giving the campers tools to do those things as well. (13:627-632)

Participant 13 explained how they felt empowered as camp staff overall because they learned how to empower themselves and empower campers.

Additionally, Participant 2 stated, “I do feel that compared to just about every other job I’ve ever had that yes, I would say I feel empowered” (2:546-547). Participant 12 said they also felt empowered while working at camp and explained, “I feel like it was just in like, a different way that I’d never experienced before. Like camp is just something that…like, they want to empower you to gain more confidence and not hide yourself, in a way” (12:418-421).

**Leadership**

The leadership development of camp staff was a message that participants perceived as being emphasized to them while working at Girl Scout camps. The message of leadership development was communicated to camp staff by council members during training at the beginning of the summer and by administrative staff (Camp Directors, Program Directors, Assistant Program Directors, Waterfront Directors) throughout the summer. Participants believed they were encouraged to develop leadership skills and were frequently encouraged to step into leadership roles within their specific units.
Participants noted that the very nature of their roles as camp staff members provided them with leadership and a way to challenge themselves. According to Participant 3, “Just being a camp counselor in general, you really have to hone your leadership skills and be able to lead a group of girls” (3:576-577). Working at a summer camp is a unique employment experience, and participants reflected on their experience as something that constantly pushed them out of their comfort zones. Participant 11 stated, “Along with campers in their comfort zones, staff members are also encouraged to be pushed out of their comfort zones” (11:336-337). Pushing staff out of their comfort zones was way to ensure staff were “living up to [their] full potential” (11:338).

When asked about what working at a Girl Scout camp has offered them, multiple participants responded by specifically identifying leadership experiences as something they gained from their time as a camp staff member. Participant 8 responded by explaining:

It offered me a lot of more leadership abilities and a lot of more leadership opportunities, so it’s really opened a few more doors for me in my year-round job. I’m able to have more responsibilities because they knew about me doing leadership things at a Girl Scout camp. (8:413-417)

Participant 6 articulated gaining similar skills in their time working at a Girl Scout camp:

I’ve gotten so much experience. Like, I personally want to go into education. So it has helped me with working with kids especially, but then also just learning leadership. Learning how to work with other people, especially since we were together 24/7. (10:236-240)

Both Participant 8 and 6 were grateful for the time they spent working at a Girl Scout camp because their leadership development helped them in their current and future careers.

Additionally, Participant 11 explained how staff’s leadership opportunities were not only a way to pursue personal and professional development as an adult. They were also a way to set an example and communicate the importance of leadership development to campers. Participant
Participant 11 stated:

If you have any interest in being, like, boating certified, consider being lifeguard certified, or if you are rope certified, try, you know? You want to be as versatile as possible, and being able to have a lot of different special skills definitely is encouraged because it means that you can encourage the campers to try these new things. But also because it builds your courage, confidence, and character. (11:338-345)

Participant 2, who has had experience in many different supervisory roles within the organization, echoed Participant 11’s reflection of leadership opportunities for staff. In their experience as a supervisor within the Girl Scout camp setting, Participant 2 explained that the council’s goal was to communicate to staff members “those same values that we want for our girls, such as leadership skills and building the courage, confidence, and character that I go back to all the time” (2:247-249). Most participants felt they were encouraged to develop their leadership skills while working at camp just as campers were encouraged to develop their leadership skills, and Participant 2 was able to provide insight from a council’s perspective that the council intended to encourage the leadership development of camp staff.

Participants identified everyday responsibilities that encouraged leadership development. For example, Participant 3 stated, “I think giving different tasks to your co-counselors or splitting up what you’re going to lead throughout the week can encourage leadership” (3:578-580). Similarly, Participant 5 explained:

Last summer we had a lot of counselor-counselor planning out things instead of like, Unit Leader-counselor weeks. I think that allowance of scheduling is part of leadership, and then figuring something out. Like every day, there’s something on the spot to figure out. (5:457-462)
At Participant 5’s camp, employee hierarchy positions the Unit Leader slightly higher than the Camp Counselor position. Although the two positions have almost identical responsibilities, the Unit Leader position has the added responsibility of scheduling and planning throughout each week. Therefore, Participant 5 was noting how counselors could assume more of a leadership role through scheduling when two counselors were working together rather than a counselor and a Unit Leader working together. Both participants 3 and 5 described scheduling and distribution of tasks as ways for Camp Counselors to assume more leadership.

Overall, participants communicated that their leadership development was encouraged by their supervisors, which included admin staff (supervisors within the camp setting) and council employees (employees of the council that did not work at camps). By receiving leadership opportunities while at work, camp staff felt they were able to set an example for campers and therefore encourage campers to pursue leadership roles as well. Additionally, camp staff were reminded of the importance of their position in shaping campers’ lives, which further solidified their identities as leaders in the camp setting. Participant 2’s council tried to communicate to staff “that they’re making a difference and to take that very seriously. They have this power to help shape this young child” (2:251-253). The very nature of staff members’ roles gave them a sense of leadership and increased responsibility, as they knew the impact they could have on young girls’ lives. However, participants did not feel encouraged to develop their leadership skills by everyone they worked with.

While participants believed they were generally given responsibility and encouraged to step into leadership roles by supervisors and council employees, they identified frequent limitations to their leadership development depending on the specific staff members they were
working with each week and the specific individuals hired onto admin staff each summer. For example, Participant 6 explained how their experiences each week depended on who they were working with:

[The level of freedom and leadership I had] depended on the unit leader I was working with. Everyone has a different work style. So, you know, I may have one week ended up with someone who was like, ‘I make the schedule. I make the rules, you kind of follow along.’ Sometimes I get someone who is like, you know, I don’t really like this scheduling stuff, and you love that stuff, so how about you do that this week. Or some people would put more of an effort into communicating with me about ideas and making a joint effort’’ (6:642-649).

As a Camp Counselor, Participant 6 had varying levels of freedom and leadership depending on the Unit Leader they were working with each week. Participant 5 explained how, in their personal experience, they were not always encouraged to adopt more leadership as a Camp Counselor because they were not higher on the ‘‘ranking system;’’ and they gave insight into what might happen if you try to take initiative when someone in a higher position does not approve:

I think we’re really focused on a ranking system. So, I feel like even if you might think that you’re doing a good thing of trying to take more initiative, sometimes it’s looked down upon. And it’s not seen as trying to step up and take initiative. It’s seen as more of like, you don’t know your place. (5:473-477)

While some participants, such as Participants 6 and 5, identified situations in which camp staff experienced limitations to their leadership and freedom to make their own decisions in the workplace, the overwhelming consensus was that staff members were encouraged to adopt leadership roles and were given the tools to do so. The extent to which they were able to adopt leadership roles in specific situations depended on the people they were working with at that time.
Inclusivity

The researcher identified inclusivity as the theme most extensively discussed by participants regarding messages communicated to and between staff members at Girl Scout camps. Almost all participants had strong feelings about inclusivity of staff members in the camps they worked at, but those feelings represented two opposing views. Some participants identified inclusivity of campers and staff members as one of the most important goals of working at a Girl Scout camp. Other participants identified a significant lack of inclusivity among staff members.

Participant 12 identified inclusivity of both campers and camp staff as the goal of working at a Girl Scout camp. They recalled their council’s CEO coming to their staff training at the beginning of the summer to discuss inclusivity. Participant 12 stated, “I remember [the council’s CEO] coming to training one day. She was just like, ‘We’re trying to include everybody and everything and empower them to keep doing what they’re doing’” (12:213-216). By attending staff training to discuss how employees should treat staff members as well as campers, the CEO seemed to clearly articulate the council’s position on inclusivity in the camp setting.

Participant 7 explained how their personal experiences made them feel like inclusivity of staff members was emphasized throughout their camp:

I rolled up, ready to learn how to be a boating instructor. Didn’t know anybody. And by the end of those three day, I had established really strong friendships with people that I probably wouldn’t have met at school or been friends with outside of camp. And, you know, they were just encouraging me because I was nervous. I’m not the most outdoorsy human being. I wasn’t at the time. I feel more well-versed now. (7:197-204)

Participant 7 had no prior camp experience and no prior friends before attending boating certification training at the beginning of the summer, yet that did not affect how other staff
members perceived or treated them. Participant 7 pointed to this specific experience as one that showed how inclusive staff could be during that particular summer.

One participant noted how they felt camp was inclusive toward staff due to the mix of representation within admin roles. Participant 11 explained that, during one year when they were working at a Girl Scout camp, the “camp director was a lesbian” (11:246-247). Participant 11 stated, “It was like, wow, the higher authority is part of this minority here, and so it definitely felt really empowering to see a woman in that position” (11:248-249). They continued to say, “It feels like people have representation in the people who are their supervisors” (11:249-251). Seeing people with similar identities in leadership positions can contribute to staff members feeling like their workplace is inclusive.

When asked to describe the culture present in the camp they worked at, Participant 6 stated, “I think it was like, a mix of traditional values and progressive values and finding a place where both of those could exist” (6:330-331). If a balance between traditional and progressive values existed within the camp environment, that could contribute to staff members with differing views to feel accepted within their workplace and free to exercise their beliefs. However, many participants provided examples of how this balance did not always exist while they worked at camps. For example, even though Participant 6 identified the balance between traditional and progressive values as being fundamental to their camp’s culture, they stated:

So maybe I’m a little biased here, but you know, I think of just my experience as a trans person working at a Girl Scout camp, and how around the end of working there I had some just, like, rough experiences. (6:202-205)

Additionally, Participant 5 explained a conflict that continued through much of the last summer they worked at camp:
We had a little bit of like, bias between people based on political views. Between like, admins too. Like how the problems were getting dealt with based on what was assumed of people’s belief systems. So like, for example, I felt like I got treated unfairly a lot in some of the situations because of my political views not being the same as [one of the admins]. For instance, when [they] were dealing with stuff, I felt that I was treated differently because um, like, I tend to lean way different than [them]. (5:249-257)

Participant 5 felt like they were treated unfairly through most of the summer due to their political beliefs, and they even listed hurtful names they were called throughout the summer based on their political beliefs. Even though the camp setting may be described as a place where traditional and progressive values can coexist, Participant 5 found the exact opposite in their situation.

Participant 5 was not the only one who felt belief systems were not respected by others in the camp setting. Participant 3 did not believe camp administrators or other camp staff communicated respecting others. They stated, “I don’t think they communicate respecting others and like, respecting other people’s views and beliefs. Because we did have problems with that last summer” (3:235-237). Participant 3 also could not confidently say whether inclusivity was communicated by their council or not, explaining they and other camp staff never had direct contact with anyone from the office other than the Outdoor Program Manager whose job it was to visit camp frequently. Participant 6 echoed participants 5 and 3, stating, “Our camp could really improve the way that we treat our other staff members and the way we talk about other staff members. And making sure that, like, coworkers feel included” (6:224-227).

Toward the end of Participant 15’s interview, the researcher asked them to explain why they did not return to work at camp after many years of attending camp as a camper and working as an employee. They explained, “The staff mentality was really a kind of us versus you sort of
deal. And not necessarily with the admin. Sometimes that happened, but amongst other camp staff” (15:467-469). When asked to elaborate on this statement, Participant 15 replied:

Like we have this…I don’t know how to describe it. Some people would brag too much. And some people would gossip about other camp counselors. I did not like gossip. That was a pretty common thing. I guess that’s what I mean by us versus them, that we’re in these cliques. And it fell into the – well, ‘We’re the good counselors and those are bad counselors.’ And I didn’t like that. (15:472-479)

Participant 15 was uncomfortable with the frequent gossip that spread throughout camp staff while they were an employee. They explained that many staff members felt like camp was a second home to them, a place they felt truly connected to that had a big impact on their lives. However, since Participant 15 did not personally feel this way about camp, they felt like they were excluded from things both inside and outside of camp:

I was one of those staff members who didn’t fall into this ‘home culture’ that’s around camp. And so, that meant that I would sometimes be distanced from things. I wouldn’t get invited to things like parties, or I would be reluctantly invited to things like that. I didn’t necessarily take it personally, but that just naturally happened because, again, I kind of went against this culture. (15:488-493)

In the same way that Participant 15 felt like they were excluded from things because they did not follow the “camp culture,” Participant 6 felt that staff members who strayed from the established camp culture were shunned by other staff members. Participant 6 explained:

I think there really is like, a sort of shunning that happens or this frustration that, you know, counselors and staff members have this expectation of ‘it should be this way.’ And if someone doesn’t follow that, that [shunning] is kind of what they receive. (6:349-353)

After reviewing participants’ descriptions of what the culture was at the camps they have worked at and their perception of inclusivity at those camps, the researcher noticed a pattern. Participants who fit into their camp’s culture identified their camp as inclusive to staff members, and
participants who did not fit into their camp’s culture identified their camp as not inclusive of all staff members.

**Individuality and Self-Expression.**

The researcher identified individuality and self-expression as a sub-theme of inclusivity. The researcher chose to present it as a subtheme because participant statements about individuality and self-expression revolve around their camps’ acceptance of employees. Participants communicated different opinions about how much freedom staff members had to express themselves and their individuality while working at camp.

Most participants identified a general acceptance of employees’ individuality and self-expression. Participant 8 stated:

> In this day and age, when everybody feels…everybody judges everyone so much; and it takes strong people to kind of turn away from that and say, ‘Hey, I do not care what you think about my style or myself. I’m still going to be me.’ So, I do think camp really emphasized, ‘Hey, be yourself, You know, we’re gonna accept you, and let’s roll with it.’ (8:280-285)

Participant 8 felt like there was a general acceptance of camp staff expressing themselves while working at camp, and other participants felt there was acceptance to a “reasonable degree” (13:401). When asked if the individuality and self-expression of camp staff was welcomed among staff members, participants 6 and 13 identified certain ways of expressing oneself that are accepted and supported in the camp workplace environment:

> Yeah, I mean, it’s not like dyeing your hair or having tattoos or any of that was ever something that couldn’t happen at camp. And we had people of all different types, you know, whether they had people who really liked art, or really liked music, or really liked athletic activities. We had all sorts of different people who liked different things. (6:450-468)

To a reasonable degree. Obviously, I mean, there are rules of course about appropriate slogans on shirts for example, and just making sure that everything is kid-friendly. But I
know tattoos, piercings, super colorful wild outfits, different colors of hair – those kinds of things are fine. Talking about ones varying identifies, amongst staff of course, is fine. (13:401-406)

Based on participants’ responses to, “Do you feel like individuality and self-expression are welcomed among staff members,” the researcher identified that outward, physical expression of one’s individuality and self-expression were perceived to be accepted and encouraged in the camp environment. However, there were certain aspects of staffs’ personalities or beliefs that were not always supported.

Participant 5 stated, “I feel like at camp, I can be a little bit more crazy than I would be in my day to day life” (5:438-439). This was a positive aspect of the camp environment for Participant 5, but it was not a positive aspect for every participant. Participant 6 explained, “I was a shy individual. And it was kind of like, you can’t be shy in this job. You gotta let that out” (6:688-689). Being loud, energetic, and “crazy” (used as a positive descriptor) were all characteristics encouraged in staff members. For staff members who were shy or were less comfortable being so open with their personalities, fitting the mold of what staff members were expected to act like was a challenge. Participant 15, a staff member who did fit the mold of a loud, energetic employee, noticed how other staff members were treated when they had different personalities:

So say if somebody didn’t have a personality that was over-the-top and eccentric, sometimes they would be looked at as not motivated or as not willing to be there, even though that just didn’t fall under their personality. So that was kind of a lack of self-expression, or more of a quiet self-expression that wasn’t really supported. (15:271-275)

Camp staff members who had big personalities, who were “over-the-top and eccentric” (15:271-272), were encouraged to express their personalities openly when engaging with both campers and staff members. However, staff members who were shy or had a “quiet self-expression”
were encouraged to “let that out” and be “a little bit more crazy” than they usually would be in their day-to-day life.

Participant 3 described the difference between situations in which the individuality and self-expression of camp staff are welcomed and situations in which those aspects of camp staff are not welcomed:

I feel like when it comes to camp things, self-expression and individuality is fine. Like, we have our different camp personas and stuff, and we run things differently; but I think when it comes to personal life – if it’s just staff and we’re just hanging, talking about real life stuff – I feel like that’s when people get judgmental. Or they start saying things, or like, bullying other people.

Participant 3 was an individual who did not feel camp staff were incredibly inclusive of each other’s beliefs, and their statement about individuality and self-expression mirrors that opinion. They felt that camp staff could express themselves in the workplace, and staff were accepted in the way they presented themselves in front of campers and the way they led/planned certain activities. However, Participant 3 did not believe that acceptance carried over into private conversations between staff members.

In summary, participants had mixed opinions about inclusivity toward camp staff members and the acceptance of individuality and self-expression within the workplace. Some participants felt that the Girl Scout camp environment was inclusive to all staff members, and staff members were inclusive toward each other. However, other participants identified specific experiences when they did not personally feel included and when they noticed others not being included based on their beliefs or self-expression.
Research Question #3

The third and final research question sought to understand message alignment within the Girl Scout camp setting by considering the messages communicated at the national and local levels as well as the messages communicated to campers and camp staff. The third research question consisted of three parts and asked: (a) To what extent do the messages communicated to Girl Scout campers align with the feminist values present in GSUSA messaging; (b) To what extent do the messages communicated to and between staff members align with the feminist values present in GSUSA messaging; and (c) To what extent do the messages communicated to campers align with the messages communicated to and between camp staff? The researcher determined if message alignment was present in each scenario by assessing if communicated messages were consistent with stakeholders’ actual experiences.

To address the three parts of Research Question #3, the following sections are organized by theme, just as the first two research questions were organized. Each theme included here was identified by the researcher as a message communicated by GSUSA and communicated to both campers and staff in the Girl Scout camp setting. Within each theme, parts a, b, and c of the third research question are addressed.

Empowerment

The first chapter of this thesis explored the messages communicated by GSUSA and the feminist nature of those messages. The researcher identified empowerment as a message emphasized frequently by GSUSA and explained how empowerment challenges the systems of white supremacy and patriarchy. Since GSUSA’s founding in 1912, the organization has placed emphasis on empowering diverse girls by offering activities that are typically geared toward
boys and men, providing opportunities for girls to learn new skills, and reminding girls they can do anything (“Our History,” n.d.). When Low first founded Girl Scouts, she encouraged girls to expand their horizons by engaging in activities such as playing sports, hiking, swimming, camping, and “telling time by the stars” (“Our History,” n.d., para. 5). GSUSA continues to encourage girls to expand their horizons, and the organization builds on Low’s initial efforts by promoting equality in professional fields. The organization encourages girls to change the world, run a business, speak up for others, explore the outdoors, and “soar with STEM” (“For Every Girl,” n.d.).

**Messaging to Campers vs. Messaging by GSUSA.**

Participants perceived empowerment to be one of the most valuable messages communicated to campers in the Girl Scout camp setting. They found it impactful to work for an organization that believes in empowering young girls to pursue the goals they set for themselves and design their own futures. Participant 12 stated, “Having an organization that encourages people to do what they want, and they can succeed if they put their mind to it – it’s just really impactful” (12:48-50). Participants felt empowerment was one of the most valuable messages for campers to receive due to the role of empowerment in participants’ own lives, the encouragement for campers to design their own personal and professional futures, and the independence and strength developed through empowerment.

Participants recognized the importance of empowering young individuals based on their own life experiences. For example, Participant 6 explained:

[Empowerment] stands out as important to me because I feel like in my life, you know, there’s been a lot of times where I’ve needed empowerment in order to get through my life, especially someone who was raised as female before transitioning. So you know, I
know what it’s like to want female empowerment to some extent, and just watching other girls get that I think is really important as well. (6:61-67)

Additionally, Participant 12 emphasized the role of empowerment in shaping girls’ futures. They stated:

A main [message] is just empowerment, and girls can do anything that they set their mind to. And if people talk down about, like, what they want to do in their future, they can just ignore that and keep going and be in STEM or whatever type of – I guess job or life – they want to achieve. (12:38-42)

Independence and strength were specific characteristics that participants believed campers were empowered to develop. Participant 8 described developing outdoor skills as a way that campers were encouraged to be “strong and independent women” (8:65-66), and developing those outdoor skills is an example of the activities GSUSA encourages girls to participate in that have not always been offered to girls.

By comparing the specific messages GSUSA communicates about empowerment to those communicated by Girl Scout camp staff to campers, the researcher found that message alignment is present. In both settings, empowerment is generated by girls learning new skills and engaging in activities that have historically not been available to or geared toward girls. In fact, attending camp is an example of an activity that Low encouraged girls to participate in that would help girls learn new skills and learn about the world around them (“Our History,” n.d.). Also, both settings discuss how girls have “a belief they could do anything” (“Our History, n.d., para. 5) and, in practice, “can do anything” (12:39). GSUSA promotes women entering STEM fields and strives to offer programs that help girls discover their potential interest in pursuing careers in STEM. Similarly, participants identified the camp setting as encouraging girls to learn about STEM through camp-specific activities. For example, Participant 12 specified entering STEM
fields as something girls my want to achieve and explained they are empowered to do so at camp.

The researcher asserts there is alignment between the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging about empowerment and the messages communicated by Girl Scout camp staff to campers because GSUSA’s communicated messages about empowerment appear to be consistent with the actual experiences of campers. However, it is important to note that the information participants provided in interviews about the messages communicated to Girl Scout campers is based on participants’ own perceptions of those messages and therefore does not represent the campers’ perceptions of their own experiences.

**Messaging to Staff vs. Messaging by GSUSA.**

Participants expressed mixed feelings about empowerment. In general, participants felt empowered in their role as camp staff members because they recognized the importance of their role in shaping young girls’ lives. Participants felt empowered by their supervisors, which included employees of the council and most camp administrative staff (i.e., Camp Directors, Program Directors, Assistant Program Directors, and Waterfront Directors). At the beginning of each summer, staff members received extensive training for two to three weeks, and participants received messages in that training period that emphasized the importance of each staff member in the lives of campers. However, camp staff members’ interactions with council employees was limited. After training at the beginning of the summer, participants could not identify other situations (except for special occasions like marketing events) in which they interacted with council employees.
Instead, camp staff primarily interacted with other camp staff post-training. When staff members identified situations in which they did not feel empowered, they mentioned other camp staff members (not council employees) as the reason they did not feel empowered. Participants’ day-to-day feelings of empowerment varied based on the individual staff members they were working with each week and the individuals who made up the administrative staff each summer. For example, Participant 3 explained how whether they felt empowered or not depended on certain factors:

I feel like, again, it depends on the day, depends on the week, summer. Because I know the first summer, yeah. Most of the time. But the second summer, no. Because I feel like the admin staff was just basically telling us what to do and not actually empowering us. (3:606-609)

Additionally, Participant 6 said they “sometimes” felt empowered and explained, “Definitely not around the end there. I felt like I was hiding myself because, you know, I couldn’t quite be what I wanted to be” (6:734-736).

Overall, participants felt their role as camp staff was empowering because they had an impact on the lives of young girls, but those feelings of empowerment were frequently impeded by the actions of other staff members. Sometimes participants did not feel empowered because they were being told what to do instead of empowered to make their own decisions, and other times they did not feel empowered because the specific staff members they were working with did not actively try to empower them.

By comparing the specific messages GSUSA communicates about empowerment to those communicated to and between camp staff, the researcher found that message alignment is not present. While some participants expressed that they did feel empowered in their role as camp staff, the majority expressed they felt empowered inconsistently. The camp setting is supposed to
be an avenue where girls feel empowered by learning new skills, exploring the world, and being
themselves, but staff were not always empowered to do those things. Sometimes, staff did not
even feel empowered to be themselves. Participants did not mention having “a belief they could
do anything,” which is prominent in GSUSA’s messaging to its members (“Our History,” n.d.,
para. 5). GSUSA communicates overall empowerment of girls and calls on adults and employees
to empower the girls, but those same adults and employees who work in the camp setting are not
all empowering each other. Therefore, GSUSA’s communicated messages do not align with the
actual experiences of participants.

**Messaging to Campers vs. Messaging to Staff.**

Participants mentioned similar aspects of empowerment while discussing messages
communicated to both campers and staff, suggesting participants were aware that they were
supposed to be feeling empowered just as campers were. They understood the importance of
empowerment in the camp setting and emphasized their role in helping campers feel empowered
through activities and discussions. However, the researcher identified a lack of alignment
between the messages of empowerment communicated to campers and messages of
empowerment communicated to and between camp staff.

As explained in the above sections, the researcher identified alignment between the
messages communicated to campers and the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging but
did not identify alignment between the messages communicated to camp staff and the feminist
values present in GSUSA’s messaging. Because messages communicated to one stakeholder
(campers) aligns with GSUSA’s messaging while messages communicated to the other
stakeholder (staff) do not, misalignment is already present. Participants perceived that messages
of empowerment were communicated to campers consistently, but the actions of other staff members led to participants not feeling like they were empowered consistently.

Ultimately, staff felt like they were empowered in their roles because they had the ability to empower campers. Supervisors emphasized to staff during training that they play an important role in shaping young girls’ lives. However, participants perceived inconsistent messaging about empowerment because they were not always empowered by other staff members. Their empowerment was dependent on the staff they were working with each week and the individuals who were members of the administrative staff each summer. Therefore, the researcher asserts that messages communicated to campers and messages communicated to and between staff members about empowerment do not align. The messages camp staff are expected to communicate to campers are not consistent with the actual experiences of participants.

**Leadership**

In the first chapter of this thesis, the researcher identified leadership as another message emphasized frequently by GSUSA and explained how fostering leadership development in young individuals challenges the systems of white supremacy and patriarchy. GSUSA has continuously been introducing more leadership opportunities to empower girls to pursue the goals they set for themselves. GSUSA takes a youth leadership approach, advocating “for youth to become active participants and learners with a focus on the positive skills, attitudes, and behaviors centered on civic involvement and personal goal setting” (Schoenberg & Salmond, 2007, p. 6). The youth leadership approach emphasizes the necessity for young individuals to be active participants in their own development and looks “at the impact they have today, not just as adults tomorrow” (Schoenberg & Salmond, 2007, pp. 6-7). One example of GSUSA’s efforts to
promote leadership development among all age-levels is the National Leadership Journeys, which focus on “particular aspects of leadership development” (High-Pippert, 2015, p. 139). The specific aspects of leadership development include “being powerful, taking action, and being part of a movement” (p. 139). Overall, GSUSA’s messaging about leadership involves girls setting their own goals, being active participants in their own development, and taking action.

**Messaging to Campers vs. Messaging by GSUSA.**

Participants perceived leadership to be a valuable message communicated by camp staff to campers. When fostering the leadership development of girls, participants focused on helping girls establish their own personalized goals. Participant 15 stated, “I think this strong sense of leadership was something that we really put forward, and a sense of self. We really focused on personalized goals, personalized leadership plans” (15:42-44). Participant 15 also explained how camp staff tried to help campers understand that everyone has the capacity to be a leader, no matter what their personality is.

Additionally, participants described leadership as a valuable message for campers because it has a lasting impact on their lives. For example, Participant 2 explained, “I think the lasting impact [camp] has on them is going to be those values of the courage, confidence, and character and being a leader that sometimes they don’t even realize that they got” (2:63-67). According to Participant 2, campers might come to camp to have fun through activities such as horseback riding, archery, and swimming, but they leave with leadership knowledge by participating in those activities.

By comparing the specific messages GSUSA communicates about leadership to those communicated by Girl Scout camp staff to campers, the researcher found that message alignment
is present. In both settings, girls are encouraged to set goals for their own development that align with their individual personalities and skill sets. GSUSA’s messaging to its Girl Scout members and camp staff’s messaging to campers promote girls being active participants in their own leadership development. Also, both the national organization and camp staff members utilize activities to foster girls’ leadership development, providing girls with knowledge about what it means to be a leader even when they are concentrating on having fun. GSUSA’s communicated messages about leadership are consistent with the actual experiences of campers (as perceived by participants); therefore, the researcher identified alignment between the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging about leadership and the messages communicated by Girl Scout camp staff to campers.

**Messaging to Staff vs. Messaging by GSUSA.**

Participants perceived leadership to be a valuable message communicated to them while working at Girl Scout camps. They felt the very nature of their roles as camp staff members provided them with opportunities to develop leadership skills every day. Participant 3 stated, “Just being a camp counselor in general, you really have to hone your leadership skills and be able to lead a group of girls” (3:576-577). Participants found themselves honing their leadership skills as they tried to set an example for campers. Participant 11 explained, “Along with campers in their comfort zones, staff members are also encouraged to be pushed out of their comfort zones” and listed specific training certifications camp staff could pursue to challenge themselves (11:336-337). In doing so, Participant 11 felt camp staff were able to set an example for campers that they, too, could try new things. Some participants noted how the leadership skills they developed while working at camp helped them/will help them enter a specific career.
A few participants perceived their ability to be leaders day-to-day was dependent on the individual camp staff they were working with each week. For instance, if a Unit Leader wanted extra help with planning and scheduling one week, their co-counselors may be able to adopt more leadership during that week. Additionally, Participant 5 identified a “ranking system” that deterred some staff members from seeking out leadership opportunities over time. These two observations are important to note; however, participants overwhelmingly felt they were given opportunities throughout each summer to develop their leadership skills and improve every day.

By comparing the specific messages GSUSA communicates about leadership to those communicated to and between camp staff, the researcher found that message alignment is present. In both settings, individuals are encouraged to expand their horizons, challenge their comfort zones, and encourage the leadership development of youth. Participants recognized themselves as role models and knew they were setting examples for campers to try new things. In a sense, staff members act as conduits for channeling the message of leadership development to campers. Additionally, GSUSA emphasizes the importance of leadership development in pursuing personalized goals, and participants recognized the impact their camp-related leadership development has had or will have on their career goals. The researcher asserts there is alignment between the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging about leadership and the messages communicated to and between camp staff members about leadership because GSUSA’s communicated messages align with the actual experiences of participants.

**Messaging to Campers vs. Messaging to Staff.**

While there were a few exceptions, participants perceived they were given opportunities to develop their leadership skills and accept greater responsibility while working as camp staff,
just as they tried to encourage campers to develop leadership skills. Regarding leadership, the researcher identified alignment between the messages communicated to campers and the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging, and she also identified alignment between the messages communicated to camp staff and the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging. The alignment between GSUSA’s messaging about leadership to both campers and staff suggests there is alignment between the messages communicated to the two stakeholders.

Participants recognized the lasting impact leadership has on campers’ lives and their own lives. They also perceived themselves to be a conduit for messages about leadership to campers because they acted as role models and set examples for girls to challenge their comfort zones. The majority of participants felt they received leadership experience from working at a Girl Scout camp and strongly felt they provided girls with leadership experience as well. Although a couple participants noted specific times when they did not feel they were given enough leadership opportunities, participants overwhelmingly felt they had day-to-day opportunities to accept greater responsibility and step into leadership roles. The researcher asserts there is alignment between the messages communicated by camp staff to campers about leadership and the messages communicated to and between camp staff about leadership. The messages camp staff are expected to communicate to campers are consistent with the actual experiences of participants.

**Inclusivity**

The final theme identified by the researcher as a message communicated by GSUSA and communicated to both campers and staff in the Girl Scout camp setting is inclusivity. Inclusivity was identified as a prominent, inherently feminist message communicated by GSUSA to its
members in the first chapter of this thesis. GSUSA frequently emphasizes that the organization is a “place for every girl” where they are encouraged to grow in a “judgment-free zone” (“For Every Girl,” n.d.). Since GSUSA’s founding in 1912, there have been no barriers of entry regarding race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Austin, 2012). Additionally, GSUSA stated in 2019 that Girl Scout programs and/or councils cannot deny a girl admission based on “race, color, ethnicity, creed, national origin, socioeconomic status, or disability” (GSUSA, 2019, p. 23).

GSUSA currently communicates the importance of diversity and inclusion within the organization and outside of the organization, focusing on racial diversity and inclusion, gender diversity and inclusion, and taking action. In the organization’s documents about World Thinking Day in 2020, girls are encouraged to take action by actively trying to create more inclusive and equitable communities (GSUSA, 2020a). GSUSA explains:

Whenever we see injustice, we all have responsibility to confront it. Every day, no matter our background or our age, every single one of us has a role to play in taking on an unfair system while working to build a new one that truly works for all. Guiding our girls in learning to recognize and challenge structures and practices that fuel inequality and cause harm helps them play an active role in creating the positive change our society needs. (“Help Your Kids,” n.d., para. 1)

GSUSA tries to make Girl Scouts and their families aware of diversity and inclusion within the organization and the world, and they call on them to be inclusive of everyone. However, GSUSA also calls girls and their families to be active participants in creating inclusive communities and therefore places emphasis on taking action rather than just being aware.

**Messaging to Campers vs. Messaging by GSUSA.**

Participants perceived inclusivity to be a valuable message communicated by Girl Scout camp staff to campers. They identified three ways inclusivity was communicated to campers,
which included accepting campers “no matter what,” (7:43), helping campers work through emotional situations, and being inclusive of transgender campers. Overall, the messages participants perceived as communicated to campers were general and did not include specifics about the traits/characteristics they were accepting.

Participant 7 described how they learned to portray acceptance to young girls while working at camp. They explained, “We spoke a lot about acceptance of who they were. That no matter what their outside world was, Girl Scouts, and the Girl Scout counselors and staff, accepted them and cared for them. No matter what” (7:40-43). Additionally, Participant 7 described how camp staff expressed support to campers, telling campers “We love you, we accept you, we’re here for you” (7:46-48). To explore gender inclusion at camp, the researcher asked each participant, “What response do you believe a transgender girl would receive if they requested to attend your camp?” Even though some participants did not know the exact answer, every participant believed or knew transgender youth were accepted at their camps.

By comparing the specific messages GSUSA communicates about inclusivity to those communicated by Girl Scout camp staff to campers, the researcher found that message alignment is present, but not fully. The messages communicated about inclusivity to campers did align with GSUSA’s messaging, but GSUSA’s messaging about inclusivity was much more detailed, in-depth, and compelling. In both settings, girls were taught they were accepted no matter what, and both GSUSA and camp staff members emphasized adults should support girls while going through emotional situations. Camp is a specific place within GSUSA where girls can feel accepted no matter what they look like, no matter what their personality is like, and no matter
what problems they are going through. The messages actively communicated to girls in the camp setting did align with the feminist values present in GSUSA messaging.

The discrepancy between messages communicated by GSUSA and messages communicated by camp staff to campers lies in the messages of inclusivity that were not mentioned as communicated in the camp setting. Participants identified staff being inclusive of campers and campers being inclusive of each other as important messages that were portrayed to campers. However, participants did not mention specifics about campers “taking action” in the camp setting or “taking action” outside of camp by applying their knowledge of inclusivity elsewhere. It appears that when inclusivity is emphasized to campers, the focus settles on being inclusive toward campers and does not move forward to teach girls about inclusiveness in a way that gives them tools to be inclusive outside of camp.

The researcher asserts there is partial alignment between the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging about empowerment and the messages communicated by Girl Scout camp staff to campers because GSUSA’s communicated messages appear to align with the actual experiences of campers (as perceived by participants). The researcher notes, however, that the national organization’s intention to encourage girls to take action was not mentioned in interviews. Therefore, the data provided in interviews cannot determine if taking action is an aspect of inclusivity communicated to campers by camp staff.

**Messaging to Staff vs. Messaging by GSUSA.**

Participants identified inclusivity as a message communicated to and between camp staff that was not always successfully implemented. Participants clearly understood the importance of being inclusive toward campers, as they were able to describe inclusivity as one of the most
valuable messages communicated to campers. Some participants felt inclusivity was a main goal of their camp while others felt camp staff were too judgmental of each other to be inclusive.

Participant 12 was one participant who perceived inclusivity of both campers and camp staff as the goal of working at a Girl Scout camp. They stated, “I remember [the council’s CEO] coming to training one day. She was just like, ‘We’re trying to include everybody and everything and empower them to keep doing what they’re doing’” (12:213-216). Additionally, Participant 7 described their experience of arriving to training on the first day when they were learning how to be a boating instructor. They did not know anyone, but immediately felt welcomed by other staff members despite their lack of prior outdoor experience.

Participant 6 described their camp’s culture as “a mix of traditional values and progressive values” but, upon reflection, realized they did not always feel that mix existed because they had challenging experiences with other staff members in response to their gender identity. Additionally, Participant 5 identified “bias between people based on political views” and felt they were “treated unfairly a lot in some situations because of [their] political views not being the same as [one of the admins]” (5:249-250, 253-255). Multiple participants felt excluded and judged at times based on their personality, beliefs, and conflicts they had with other staff members. Gossip among staff members was noted as a cause for some staff members feeling excluded and/or shunned. Participant 6 stated, “Our camp could really improve the way that we treat our other staff members and the way we talk about other staff members. And making sure that, like, coworkers feel included” (6:224-227).

Also, while individuality and self-expression among staff members was generally accepted, certain personality traits were frowned upon among camp staff. Participants who had
naturally bigger personalities and were more comfortable with being loud and “crazy” (5:438) felt they were able to express themselves while working at camp. On the other hand, participants who had a “quiet self-expression” (15:275) felt their personality traits were not as acceptable. Participant 6 explained, “I was a shy individual. And it was kind of like, you can’t be shy in this job. You gotta let that out” (6:688-689).

By comparing the specific messages GSUSA communicates about inclusivity to those communicated to and between camp staff, the researcher found that message alignment is not present. Participants know they need to be inclusive of all campers and can identify ways in which they put that into practice, but they cannot say the same for each other. Some participants felt that staff were inclusive of each other, but that was an exception to the majority who vocalized specific incidents in which they felt excluded, judged, or shunned. Participant 15 recognized an “us versus them” mentality that led to certain staff members thinking, “‘We’re the good counselors and those are bad counselors’” (15:475, 478-479).

While a few participants expressed that they felt camp was an inclusive workplace environment for staff members, the majority expressed a lack of inclusivity among staff members. GSUSA emphasizes that the organization is “for every girl” (“For Every Girl,” n.d.), but participants did not always feel that Girl Scout camp as a work environment was for every staff member. Therefore, the researcher asserts there is not alignment between the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging and the messages communicated to and between camp staff members related to inclusivity. GSUSA’s communicated messages about inclusivity do not align with the actual experiences of participants.
Messaging to Campers vs. Messaging to Staff.

Participants believed camp staff were able to recognize the importance of accepting all campers, but they did not feel like staff members were all accepting of each other. The belief that individuals were accepted “no matter what” (7:43) was not present among staff members. The researcher identified a lack of alignment between the messages of inclusivity communicated to campers and the messages of inclusivity communicated to and between staff.

As previously explained, the researcher identified alignment between the messages communicated to campers about inclusivity and the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging about inclusivity, but she did not identify alignment between the messages communicated to camp staff about inclusivity and the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging about inclusivity. Because messages communicated to one stakeholder (campers) aligns with GSUSA’s messaging while messages communicated to the other stakeholder (staff) do not, misalignment is already present. This is similar to the dynamic between GSUSA’s messaging about empowerment and participants not feeling empowered in the camp setting. Participants perceived that messages of inclusivity were communicated to campers consistently, but the actions of other staff members led to participants feeling a lack of inclusivity among camp staff.

Ultimately, participants knew they were supposed to be inclusive toward campers while working at Girl Scout camp, and they believed they actively communicated inclusivity and acceptance of campers. They did not feel inclusivity was a consistent message communicated to and between camp staff. Participants’ feelings of inclusivity in the camp workplace environment was dependent on the staff they were working with at different times throughout the summer and
the political-social beliefs of the individuals on the administrative staff team. Therefore, the researcher asserts that messages communicated to campers and messages communicated to and between staff members about inclusivity do not align.

**Summary of Message Alignment**

The researcher identified four themes as relevant to the messages communicated to Girl Scout campers and four themes as relevant to the messages communicated to and between Girl Scout camp staff members. The themes, or overall messages, perceived by participants included empowerment, leadership, personal development, and inclusivity. The themes perceived by participants as communicated to and between staff members included empowerment, leadership, inclusivity, and individuality and self-expression.

After reviewing participants’ perceptions of the messages communicated to campers and staff members, the two stakeholders seem to receive similar messages to each other and similar messages to those communicated by GSUSA to its members. Both stakeholders receive messages of empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity. Additionally, the theme of individuality and self-expression was identified by the researcher as a sub-theme of inclusivity for staff members and is therefore not different from the general messages of inclusivity communicated to both stakeholders. If looking only at the themes listed side-by-side, it would seem the messages communicated to campers are also communicated to staff members. They are also all messages detailed in Chapter 1 as communicated by GSUSA to its members. However, the analysis of all themes in the first two research questions expresses a more complicated relationship between the messages communicated to each stakeholder.
Messages of empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity strongly align with the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging, but they are communicated at different levels of consistency to campers and staff. The messages are communicated more strongly and consistently to campers than they are communicated to and between staff members. Participants’ recollections of conflict between staff members show that the professionalism expected of them ensure they do not let staff issues in the way of campers’ experiences. For example, Participant 13 explained:

The main thing was girls first. So, while there might be issues that you’re struggling with, or if there’s a disagreement between staff, that those should be handled in a responsible and professional manner. And that we’re supposed to be there ultimately to keep the girls safe and to give them a positive camp experience. (13:279-284)

Camp staff were trained to handle personal conflicts with other staff members in a way that did not negatively affect campers’ experiences. Therefore, negative experiences between staff members ideally did not affect campers’ perceptions of the messages communicated to them while attending camp. Even if staff did not feel empowered, for example, they knew it was still important that they empowered campers. If campers are truly receiving consistent messaging about empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity, it could be because they are not privy to the conflicts between staff members.

In summary, messages communicated to campers and staff as well as messages included in GSUSA’s messaging fit into similar themes, especially empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity. However, the consistency of the messages differs depending on the stakeholder. Participants perceived that campers are consistently sent messages of empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity through activities and direct discussions. In contrast, participants did not perceive consistent messaging to and between camp staff, attributing much of the inconsistency to
variables that changed summer to summer, week to week. The extent to which participants felt empowered, accepted, and given leadership opportunities depended on the people they were working with.

The messages communicated to campers about empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity aligned with the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging about empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity. The messages communicated to camp staff about leadership also aligned with the messages communicated to campers and the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging about leadership. However, messages communicated to camp staff about empowerment and inclusivity did not align with the messages communicated to campers and the feminist values present GSUSA’s messaging.

Summary

This chapter provided the results of data collection by discussing the themes established by the researcher. Messages of empowerment, leadership, inclusivity, and personal development were all identified as communicated by camp staff to campers. Messages of empowerment, leadership, inclusivity, and individuality and self-expression were identified as communicated to and between camp staff. The researcher found that there was alignment between the messages communicated to campers and the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging about empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity. However, there was not alignment between the messages communicated to and between camp staff and the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging about empowerment and inclusivity. There was also not alignment between the messages communicated to campers and staff about empowerment and inclusivity. In the next chapter, the researcher presents a discussion of the results.
Chapter 4
DISCUSSION

This thesis was a study of message alignment within GSUSA, focusing on the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging, the messages communicated to Girl Scout campers, and the messages communicated to and between Girl Scout camp staff members. The results indicate there is alignment within certain messages communicated at the national and local levels, but there is not alignment within all messages. The following discussion offers an analysis of the results provided in Chapter 3, explains the limitations and implications of this study, and provides recommendations for future research.

Messages Sent to Campers

The first research question asked: What messages do Girl Scout camp staff send to campers? The researcher identified four themes related to the first research question, which included empowerment, leadership, personal development, and inclusivity. The results of the thematic analysis presented in Chapter 3 indicate that messages about all four themes are communicated consistently to campers. The researcher noted that the consistency of the themes is based on participants’ perceptions and not on campers’ perceptions of their own experiences.

There are two reasons why the identified messages may emerge in the camp environment. First, empowerment, leadership, personal development (developing courage, confidence, and character), and inclusivity are all messages emphasized by GSUSA in its communication to
members. The fact that participants identified these messages as the most valuable ones communicated to campers suggests staff are aware of the national organization’s goals and how they communicate those goals. Camp staff must go through extensive training on many topics relevant to working with various age groups, including how to interact with campers in a way that empowers them, helps them build leadership skills, helps them develop courage, confidence, and character, and helps them feel accepted.

Second, the communication of these messages fosters an environment where campers can try new things and challenge themselves because they are not afraid of judgment, criticism, or failure. GSUSA recognizes the importance of empowerment, leadership, personal development, and inclusivity in everyday life, but they are especially important in the camp setting. Without staff communicating these messages, campers would not have the tools necessary to grow.

**Messages to and Between Staff Members**

The second research question asked: What messages are communicated to and between staff members? The researcher identified four themes as addressing this question, including empowerment, leadership, inclusivity, and individuality and self-expression. The results of the thematic analysis presented in Chapter 3 indicate that messages about leadership are communicated consistently to staff members, but messages about empowerment, inclusivity, and individuality and self-expression are communicated inconsistently.

Participants had mixed feelings about if they were empowered while working at Girl Scout camps. They generally felt their positions were empowering because they recognized the importance of their role in shaping young girls’ lives. Participants felt empowered by their supervisors during training at the beginning of the summer, but they did not always feel
empowered by other staff members or members of the administrative staff throughout the summer. When staff members identified situations in which they did not feel empowered, they mentioned other camp staff members as the reason they did not feel empowered.

Leadership was identified by participants as a valuable message communicated to them while working at Girl Scout camps. They felt the very nature of their roles as camp staff members provided them with opportunities to develop leadership skills every day. Participants provided limited examples of situations when they were discouraged to step into leadership roles and accept greater responsibility, and the majority of participants believed they received consistent messaging about leadership development.

Inclusivity, as well as its sub-theme of individuality and self-expression, was identified by participants as an important message communicated to them while working at Girl Scout camps. While they identified inclusivity as an important message, they also expressed their camps were only inclusive and encouraging of self-expression to an extent. They believed messages of inclusivity were not always successfully implemented. Some participants felt inclusivity was a main goal of their camp, but others felt camp staff were too judgmental of each other to be inclusive.

The four identified themes may emerge in the camp workplace setting because staff members are trained on how to communicate them to campers. Participants were able to connect the messages they needed to communicate to campers to their own experiences. Additionally, they were able to identify that they were supposed to feel empowered, accepted, and able to express themselves freely just as campers can. However, participants received inconsistent messaging about empowerment and inclusivity while working at Girl Scout camps. Participants
attributed inconsistent messaging about the identified themes to conflict, gossip, and lack of inclusivity among staff members, which are all examples of destructive workplace communication. The researcher asserts that the presence of destructive workplace communication within the camp setting impedes the ability of staff members to feel empowered, accepted, and free to express themselves.

**Destructive Workplace Communication**

The way employees communicate with each other, and the way they are communicated with by leadership, shapes their perceptions of the workplace. If employees constantly experience negative interactions with other organizational members, it is significantly more difficult for them to have a positive view of the organization and their specific work environment. Destructive workplace communication refers to “intentional or unintentional communication that attacks receivers’ self-esteem or reputation, or reflects indifference towards others’ basic values, and is harmful to organizational members, groups within organizations, or organizations as a whole” (Lutgen-Sandvik & Sypher, 2009, p. 391). Essentially, destructive workplace communication is harmful to the individuals who receive it, individuals who witness it, and the entire organization (Lutgen-Sandvik & Sypher, 2009).

There are several types of destructive communication that frequently occur within the workplace, including incivility, ostracism, discrimination, sexual harassment, and bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik & Sypher, 2009). The results of this study suggest that incivility and ostracism are present within the Girl Scout camps that participants worked. These two destructive communication behaviors are defined and applied to the results of this study below.
Incivility involves communication behaviors that demean, demoralize, or degrade others (Gill & Sypher, 2009). Incivility can be intentional or unintentional and vary in intensity (Gill & Sypher, 2009). This destructive communication behavior often goes unnoticed because it can be subtle, and it can be difficult to follow through with consequences because it may be unintentional (Gill & Sypher, 2009). Nevertheless, it attacks the self-worth of receivers. Participants identified gossiping as a frequent behavior among camp staff, and they believed it had a negative effect on their satisfaction at work. For example, Participant 15 explained:

Like we have this…I don’t know how to describe it. Some people would brag too much. And some people would gossip about other camp counselors. I did not like gossip. That was a pretty common thing. I guess that’s what I mean by us versus them, that we’re in these cliques. And it fell into the – well, ‘We’re the good counselors and those are bad counselors.’ And I didn’t like that. (15:472-479)

Not only did Participant 15 notice the negative impact gossip had on their work environment, but they also mentioned an “us versus them” mentality that involved staff separating themselves from others when they believed they were better counselors (15:476). This separation was based on staff members’ judgment of each other’s professional capabilities, and it may lead to ostracism.

Ostracism is the intentional act of physically or socially excluding someone within the work environment (Sias, 2009). Employees may ostracize an individual by intentionally ignoring them in conversation, moving their workspace away from all other employees so the target must work alone, or vocally express they are not welcomed as part of the group (Sias, 2009). Multiple participants felt excluded and judged at times based on their personality, beliefs, and conflicts they had with other staff members. Gossip and judgement among staff were noted as a cause for some staff members feeling excluded and/or shunned. Participant 6 stated, “Our camp could
really improve the way that we treat our other staff members and the way we talk about other staff members. And making sure that, like, coworkers feel included” (6:224-227). Participant 5 believed there was “bias between people with political views” and felt they were treated unfairly “because of [their] political views not being the same as [one of the admins]” (5:249-250, 254-255). The results suggest that multiple participants felt excluded or shunned at one point or another while working as a camp staff member, which is an indication that ostracism was present while participants worked at Girl Scout camps.

Whether overt or subtle, all types of destructive workplace communication have the power to accumulate over time, impose on an individual’s personal happiness and self-esteem, and create a work environment that breaks down an employee’s trust in the messages their organization is communicating (Gill & Sypher, 2009). While participants did not mention incivility or ostracism by name, they articulated specific examples of times when they did not feel empowered, accepted or free to express themselves in the workplace. They explained how their satisfaction as a Girl Scout camp employee was impeded at times by the actions of other staff members. They used the words excluded, judged, and shunned to describe their negative experiences with other staff members, suggesting destructive communication was present in the camp work environment included in this study.

Message Alignment

Chapter 3 presented three overall observations about message alignment within GSUSA. Based on the analysis of the results, the researcher concluded: (1) There is alignment between the messages communicated to campers and GSUSA’s messaging about three themes; (2) There is
alignment between the messages communicated to staff members and GSUSA’s messaging about two themes; and (3) There is alignment between the messages communicated to campers and to camp staff about two themes. This section explores why alignment may or may not exist by addressing RQ3(a), (b), and (c).

**Alignment in Messages to Campers**

Research Question #3(a) asked: To what extent do the messages communicated to Girl Scout campers align with the feminist values present in GSUSA messaging? The results indicate there is message alignment about empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity. The reason for this alignment may be that staff are trained at the beginning of the summer on how to communicate these specific messages to campers. Additionally, staff may be taught the goals of the national organization and their personal role in accomplishing those goals.

If staff are trained on the national organization’s goals and how to communicate GSUSA’s messaging to campers, this suggests GSUSA is successfully communicating messages of empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity to local councils. Further, it suggests GSUSA’s local councils are successfully training camp staff members to empower campers, provide campers with leadership opportunities, and be inclusive of all campers. If the perceptions participants hold about campers’ experiences are accurately representing campers’ actual experiences, then GSUSA is also successfully challenging systems of white supremacy and patriarchy through Girl Scout camps.

Chapter 1 described the messages GSUSA communicates about empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity; and it explained how all three messages challenge systems of white
supremacy and patriarchy. Challenging systems of imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy is a goal of feminism (hooks, 2015). The alignment between GSUSA’s messaging and the messages communicated to campers suggests GSUSA effectively challenges white supremacy and patriarchy within the camp setting and through the camp setting. Girl Scout camps are an avenue for GSUSA to reach young individuals and inspire empowerment, leadership development, and inclusivity within youth.

Alignment in Messages to Camp Staff

Research Question #3(b) asked: To what extent do the messages communicated to and between staff members align with the feminist values present in GSUSA messaging? The results indicate there is message alignment about leadership, but there is not message alignment about empowerment and inclusivity.

The alignment between the messages camp staff receive and the messages GSUSA communicates about leadership suggests staff members are given ample opportunities to develop leadership skills and accept increasing responsibility while working at Girl Scout camps. If participants’ perceptions represent the experiences of most camp staff (within the two councils included in this study), then camp staff are taught the importance of their own leadership development through direct communication and/or the nature of their position. This alignment may be a result of supervisors relaying the importance of staff members giving each other opportunities to step into leadership roles.

The misalignment between the messages camp staff receive and GSUSA’s messaging about empowerment and inclusivity may be a result of three things. First, destructive workplace communication among staff members may impede the organization’s efforts to empower and
portray acceptance to all stakeholders. The presence of destructive workplace communication and the perceived lack of empowerment and inclusivity suggests that staff are not able to receive the assistance, information, and support they need from other staff members and supervisors. The very existence of destructive communication makes the environment unsupportive for staff members.

Second, supervisors may not be emphasizing to staff members the need for them to empower and accept each other. It is possible that the extensive training staff members must undergo is entirely focused on the campers’ experiences and does not provide expectations for staff communication or conflict resolution.

Third, supervisors and coworkers may not understand how to consistently empower other staff members because camp staff positions are examples of alternative membership contracts. Ashcraft and Kedrowicz (2002) found that employees with alternative membership contracts (e.g., workers who are volunteers, part-time, seasonal, temporary, and subcontracted) require different empowerment strategies than full-time employees. In their study of volunteers, Ashcraft and Kedrowicz (2002) found that standard empowerment practices resulted in the volunteers feeling disempowered because there was a lack of understanding about their unique experiences. Ashcraft and Kedrowicz’s (2002) research suggests such employees with alternative membership contracts are empowered by the freedom to dictate how much responsibility is a reasonable amount, receive the information and assistance they need from other staff members, “‘make a difference’ through meaningful work,” and “rely on the final authority and accountability of staff” (p. 105). In other words, organizational members who are in seasonal roles (such as Girl Scout camp staff) are empowered differently than employees with traditional membership
contracts. To camp staff, empowerment may look like the ability to determine their own involvement in the organization, receive physical and emotional support from other staff members, and rely on hierarchical structure to receive necessary guidance for their role (Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2002).

Ashcraft and Kedrowicz’s (2002) research sheds an important light on the findings of this study. It suggests that staff members are not able to dictate how much responsibility is a reasonable amount. Some participants described situations in which they were given too much responsibility without the support needed to accomplish tasks, while other participants described situations in which they desired more responsibility. If individual staff members had more freedom to dictate the amount of responsibility that was appropriate for their role, they may feel more empowered.

Chapter 1 identified empowerment and inclusivity as messages communicated by GSUSA that challenge systems of white supremacy and patriarchy. The lack of alignment between messaging by GSUSA and to/between camp staff about empowerment and inclusivity indicates that GSUSA does not effectively challenge white supremacy and patriarchy among camp staff. It is important that GSUSA’s messaging to all stakeholders challenge white supremacy and patriarchy because doing so contributes to ending sexist oppression (hooks, 2015), breaking down the institutional structures that allow for racism (Sully, 2018), and erasing the roles and expectations placed on individuals based on gender (hooks, 2010). Ending sexist oppression, racism, and gender expectations are all clear goals of the organization, as GSUSA emphasizes racial diversity and inclusion, gender diversity and inclusion, and developing more inclusive and equitable communities (GSUSA, 2020b).
Alignment in Messages to Campers and Staff

Research Question #3(c) asked: To what extent do the messages communicated to campers align with the messages communicated to and between camp staff? The results of this research question indicate there is message alignment about leadership, but there is not message alignment about empowerment and inclusivity.

The alignment between the messages camp staff send to campers and the messages they receive about leadership suggests staff members recognize the importance of campers’ leadership development as well as their own. They understand how to provide campers with leadership opportunities because they know how valuable their own leadership development is. This message alignment may be a result of clear, consistent messaging from supervisors to staff about the importance of giving campers and each other ample opportunities to develop leadership skills. In other words, staff do not believe leadership opportunities appear on their own. Rather, they understand those opportunities must be created and given to others. An example of this active leadership development in others may be a staff member inviting a camper or coworker to lead an activity instead of doing it themselves.

The misalignment between the messages camp staff send to campers and the messages they receive about empowerment and inclusivity may be due to the training process and lack of staff accountability throughout the summer. When staff receive training at the beginning of each summer, it seems they primarily focus on the campers’ experiences of attending camp and do not focus on the staffs’ experiences of working at camp. While it is incredibly important for staff to understand the many factors that contribute to campers’ experiences, it is also important for them to understand how their actions affect other staff members, both on and off the clock. GSUSA
aims to empower and be inclusive of its members, and camp staff are members of the organization. Therefore, staff members may need additional training that focuses on being mindful of how their actions – both positive and negative – affect their coworkers.

Limitations

While preparing for and conducting interviews, the researcher ran into challenges that limited the scope of this study. When the preliminary textual analysis was first being conducted, there were documents from five total councils being analyzed instead of documents from only two councils. In the middle of conducting and writing the textual analysis, the researcher lost access to three councils’ published camp documents due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic caused every Girl Scout council in the state to cancel camp for the summer of 2020, and councils removed their summer 2020 camp documents from their website. The researcher still had personal access to two of the councils’ documents and therefore narrowed the scope of the study to those two councils. As explained in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the information provided in the final textual analysis informed the interview protocol.

The COVID-19 pandemic also impacted the research by preventing in-person interviews. The researcher conducted all interviews through Microsoft Teams and Google Hangouts. While conducting interviews through video calls did not limit the number of participants, it did impact the demographic questions the researcher was comfortable asking participants. The researcher had planned to ask participants their sexual orientation to understand if diverse sexual orientations were present among camp staff, but she decided to remove the question from the interview protocol after the first interview. The first participant was uncomfortable with the question, and the researcher realized many of the participants were young and living with their
parents. The researcher anticipated that other participants may feel uncomfortable talking about their sexual orientation if their parents could overhear. The researcher addressed this problem by removing the question about sexual orientation from the interview protocol and adding a final demographic question that asked, “Are there any other aspects of your identity or ‘invisible diversity’ that you would like to share?” Most participants answered this question by saying no, but two participants shared their sexual orientation.

The final limitation of this study is the lack of diversity among participants, camp staff, and campers. All fifteen participants were white and non-Hispanic. Thirteen identified as cisgender women, meaning their gender identity aligns with the female sex assigned to them at birth. Only two participants did not identify as cisgender women. One of those two participants identified as non-binary using they/them pronouns, and the second identified as trans, female to male. Three participants identified themselves as upper-middle class, ten identified as middle class, and two identified as lower-middle class. These demographics show the lack of diversity among participants, as all participants were white and non-Hispanic; and the majority of participants were cisgender women and middle class.

The lack of diversity among participants suggests a potential lack of diversity among camp staff at the two councils included in this study, and participants’ reflections of diversity within their camps portrayed a lack of diversity among camp staff and campers. This lack of diversity within the camps of the two councils included in this study does not immediately suggest that minority groups do not feel welcomed within the Girl Scout camp setting because the regions around the two councils are also not particularly racially diverse. However, it is a limitation of this study because research on more diverse camps may offer more detailed
information about inclusivity from the perspective of people with different genders, socioeconomic statuses, races, ethnicities, abilities, and opinions.

**Implications**

The findings about message alignment and misalignment in this study suggest GSUSA utilizes camp staff to empower campers, provide campers with leadership opportunities, and communicate inclusivity among campers, yet GSUSA does not identify and/or utilize specific people to do the same things for staff members. It is possible this is a responsibility of individual Girl Scout council employees, but participants did not have enough interactions with council employees past training that would foster continued empowerment and inclusivity among staff.

The researcher identified alignment: (1) between the messages communicated to campers and GSUSA’s messaging about empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity; (2) between the messages communicated to camp staff and GSUSA’s messaging about leadership; and (3) between the messages communicated to campers and to camp staff about leadership. Because alignment was present in these three channels, GSUSA challenges white supremacy and patriarchy in its messaging to campers about empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity, and it challenges white supremacy and patriarchy in its messaging to camp staff about leadership.

When an organization communicates clear and consistent messages that align with the organization’s goals, stakeholders understand the organization’s values and can therefore identify more strongly with them. For organizations like GSUSA who aim to help or empower a group of individuals, enlisting employees who believe in that goal is necessary. Strong message alignment helps employees “share the purpose and values of the organization” and fosters an employee’s trust in the organization (Smikle, 2002, p. 27). Participants did not speak specifically
about organizational trust, but the results of the second research question indicate that participants perceived they were given leadership opportunities and frequently encouraged to develop leadership skills. This aligned with the messages GSUSA communicates to its members and the messages staff are expected to communicate to campers. Because message alignment existed between both stakeholders within the national and local levels regarding leadership, it is likely that staff members believe in GSUSA’s goal of leadership development. It is also likely that staff members trust in the organization when it claims to provide individuals with leadership opportunities because staff are personally receiving those opportunities.

The researcher identified a lack of alignment: (1) between the messages communicated to camp staff and GSUSA’s messaging about empowerment and inclusivity, and (2) between the messages communicated to campers and to camp staff about empowerment and inclusivity. Because alignment was not present in these two channels, GSUSA does not challenge white supremacy in its messaging to staff about empowerment and inclusivity.

It is important for organizations to identify when communicated messages are not followed through with action to every stakeholder, and it is necessary they understand how to address when this occurs. Even when an organization cares about the experiences of employees, the primary audience is often not employees. The misalignment between GSUSA’s communicated messages and the experiences of camp staff members may be a result of GSUSA’s primary audience being young girls and not employees. While it makes sense for the organization to focus on young girls as its primary audience, the experiences of employees are still important. Employees’ experiences can affect their job satisfaction and their view of the organization.
When an organization communicates unclear or inconsistent messages, stakeholders may lose trust and perceive the organization to be hypocritical (Smikle, 2002). Because there was not message alignment between GSUSA’s messaging and the messages staff receive about empowerment and inclusivity, it is possible that staff believe less in the organization’s goals of empowering and accepting all stakeholders. Participants believed they communicated empowerment and acceptance consistently to campers, so participants were clearly able to recognize the importance of those messages to young individuals. However, they may not believe empowering and accepting adults is important to the organization.

Additionally, if there are not efforts to empower and show inclusivity to camp staff, they may not be able to fully recognize how to instill those things in others. The work environment plays a large role in the satisfaction, trust, and productivity of employees (Gill & Sypher, 2009). Ethically, organizations should care about the work experiences of their employees, especially when the organization has a communicated goal of building courage, confidence, and character in its members. However, organizations should also care about the work experiences of their employees because employees who “share the purpose and values of the organization” (Smikle, 2002, p. 27) may be able to pursue the organization’s goals more effectively. In this case, one of the organization’s goals is to empower and show inclusivity to campers.

This chapter defined destructive workplace communication and identified its presence within the Girl Scout camp setting after reviewing participants’ perceptions of their work environment. According to Gill and Sypher (2009), ongoing destructive communication contributes to “eroded or damaged” organizational trust by crippling organizational members’ “ability to communicate, discuss, and dialogue in ways that build communal organizations” (pp.
Constant exposure to destructive communication acts within the workplace leads to distrust in coworkers, distrust in leadership’s ability/willingness to confront a destructive environment, and distrust in the organization’s priorities (Gill & Sypher, 2009). If the destructive communication that is present among staff members continues, it is possible that staff members will become less effective at communicating GSUSA’s feminist values to campers.

**Future Research**

The researcher presents three recommendations for future research. First, an ethnographic or interview study could be conducted within specific Girl Scout camps to better understand seasonal camp staff positions as particular alternative membership contracts. In doing so, more applicable information could be provided on how to empower camp staff members and encourage inclusivity. Second, a study that includes a larger number of Girl Scout camps would be beneficial; and it would be especially beneficial if the study were conducted in a more diverse region.

Finally, future research could explore the intersection of class and capitalism within the Girl Scout camp setting. bell hooks (2015) emphasized the role that feminism plays in challenging capitalism along with imperialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. The researcher did not identify capitalism as a construct challenged within the Girl Scout camp environment, nor did the researcher find themes related to capitalism, such as socioeconomic status. Participants did not identify any messages communicated to campers or camp staff that would challenge capitalism specifically. When participants discussed the socioeconomic status of campers and staff, they perceived everyone to be somewhere in the middle class. If future research is conducted on the intersection of class and capitalism within the Girl scout camp
setting, more information may be found regarding GSUSA’s ability or desire to challenge capitalism at the national and/or local levels.

Conclusion

This thesis studied message alignment within GSUSA by focusing on GSUSA’s communicated messages, messages communicated to campers, and messages communicated to camp staff. The first chapter of this study reviewed pertinent organizational details about GSUSA and utilized hooks’ (2015) definition of feminism to examine GSUSA’s current messaging. The four constructs challenged by feminism (imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy) were applied to GSUSA’s messaging to evaluate the feminist nature of the organization’s communicated messages. The chapter concluded with a description of message alignment, the importance of alignment between the messages communicated to internal and external publics, and the relevance of message alignment to the present study.

Chapter 2 provided a description of the methods used in this study. It included a rationale for the research design, details about participants, an explanation of the study procedures, and information about the data set included in this study.

Chapter 3 provided the results of data collection by discussing the themes established by the researcher. The researcher identified empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity as messages communicated by GSUSA and communicated to campers and staff in the Girl Scout camp environment. The results indicated there was alignment between the messages communicated to campers and the feminist values present in GSUSA’s messaging about empowerment, leadership, and inclusivity. However, there was not alignment between the messages communicated to and between camp staff and the feminist values present in GSUSA’s
messaging about empowerment and inclusivity. There was also not alignment between the messages communicated to campers and to staff about empowerment and inclusivity.

Chapter 4 was a discussion of the results, and it analyzed why certain messages were or were not communicated consistently within the camp environment. The researcher provided an analysis for each research question, limitations of the study, implications of the study’s results, and recommendations for future research.
REFERENCES


Arneil, B. (2010). Gender, diversity, and organizational change: The Boy Scouts vs. Girl Scouts of America. Perspectives on Politics, 8(1), 53-68. doi:10.1017/s1537592709992660


APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM
Title of Study: Consistency in Organizational Message Communication

Investigator’s Name: Emily Hinrichsen
Dept: Communication
Phone: (309) 532-9507

Key Information
• This is a voluntary research study on the messages GSUSA communicates to its members.
• This 60-90 minute interview study includes questions about the participant’s demographics, the messages communicated to girl scouts and staff members, and staff relationships and interactions.
• The benefits include developing a reflection on the messages communicated to campers and staff at Girl Scout camps and developing a preliminary understanding of message alignment within GSUSA. No significant risks are apparent.

Description of the Study
The purpose of the study is to evaluate the messages GSUSA communicates to its members. “Members” in this study include the girls and young women involved in the organization and the individuals employed as staff members at various Girl Scout camps. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to answer questions about the following topics: the messages communicated to Girl Scouts, specifically those who attend Girl Scout camp; the messages communicated to the staff members employed at those camps; and your relationships and interactions with fellow staff members. With your permission, I would also like to voice-record the interview on my phone.

Risks and Benefits
The only reasonably foreseeable risk within this study is breach of confidentiality. While efforts will be made to maintain confidentiality, there is a small possibility that someone might suspect you participated in the interview based on information that you might share with me.

The hope is that you will benefit from discussing how the messages communicated by GSUSA have impacted you as either a Girl Scout or as an employee. Specifically, you may benefit from verbally processing the situations you have experienced and the messages communicated to you by the organization. This study will create a better understanding of how people perceive organizational messages communicated by GSUSA and provide insight on how to improve the camp experience for campers and staff members. The knowledge provided throughout this study may be used to further research on consistency of communicated organizational messages.

Confidentiality
• The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file.
• If you consent to having this interview’s audio recorded, the recording will be collected by the researcher’s cell phone, protected by a passcode. You should be aware that the files will
be uploaded to an automated transcription service. While the recordings are uploaded to the service, there is a possibility that the recordings could be used for training the automated program. When the transcripts are complete, the recording and the transcriptions will be deleted from the online transcription program. Once transcription is completed, the transcription and audio recording will be stored on a password protected computer, and the original audio file will be deleted from the researcher’s phone.

- Consent forms and printouts of transcriptions will be stored in separate locations. Recordings will be saved on a password protected computer for five years following the publication of this study. The researcher will replace identifying names with pseudonyms in both the written transcripts of interviews and the incorporation of interview information in the final project.

**Your Rights**

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to skip any question or research activity, as well as to withdraw completely from participation at any point during the process.

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered before, during, or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact the researcher, Emily Hinrichsen, at hinrichsen.emily@gmail.com or by telephone at (309) 532-9507. Since this is a student project, you may also contact the researcher’s thesis advisor, Dr. Valde, with questions or concerns regarding the study. You may contact her at 815-753-7106 or kvalde@niu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or if you have any problems or concerns that occur as a result of your participation, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance, Integrity, and Safety at (815)753-8588.

**Future Use of the Research Data**

Your information collected as a part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research, even if all identifiers are removed.

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigator.

Participant’s Signature __________________________ Date __________

I give my consent to be audio recorded during the interview.

Participant’s Signature __________________________ Date __________
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Protocol: Consistency in Organizational Message Communication

Introduction

Thank you for coming to talk with me today. I’m excited to start talking about a topic that has played a big part in both of our lives. I am conducting these interviews as part of research for my thesis, which is part of the process of earning my master’s degree.

Today we will be talking about the messages the Girl Scouts, or GSUSA, communicates to its members. First, I will ask you some questions about yourself, next I will ask you questions about the messages GSUSA communicates to the girls and young women who attend Girl Scout camps, then I will ask you questions about the messages that are communicated to and between staff members at those camps. Finally, we will move to a discussion about your past and current relationships with fellow staff members.

The interview will take about 60-90 minutes.

I’m interested in talking with you about these topics because, after working so long at various Girl Scout camps, I want to hear other staff members’ perceptions of the goals of the organization and how these translate into a camp setting. My hope is that I can personally learn more about message consistency within GSUSA by looking specifically at Girl Scout camps.

Before we start the interview, I would like to take a moment to discuss informed consent and confidentiality with you. After hearing my description of the topics I’m researching and the questions I will be asking throughout the interview today, you have the right to decide whether you would still like to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you have the right to refuse to answer any question and you may stop the interview at any point. In order to protect your confidentiality and the confidentiality of people you may talk about, I will use pseudonyms in the transcriptions and in the reporting of results. If you agree to participate in the study, I will have you sign an informed consent document. Part of the informed consent process involves giving separate permission for me to audio-record the interview. Please take a few moments to read over the details in the document and please ask me any questions you might have about the information in it.

*Have participant read and sign consent form.*
Demographic Information

I would like to first ask you some quick questions about yourself.

Were you ever a Girl Scout?

How many years were you a Girl Scout?

How many years have you worked at a Girl Scout camp?

How many Girl Scout camps have you worked at?

How many councils did this include?

How old are you?

What is your ethnic identification?

What is your gender identification?

How would you describe your socioeconomic class background?

Do you feel like you are in a different socioeconomic class now compared to when you were growing up?

Are there other aspects of your identity – or aspects of “invisible diversity” – that you would like to share?

Thank you. Now, let’s talk about the messages you and other staff members communicate to the girls and young women who attend Girl Scout camp. Throughout this interview, I will be using the term “messages” frequently. When I say this, I’m referring to the specific values, ideas, and themes the organization communicates to its audiences. Does this make sense?

Messages Communicated to Campers

What messages do you believe are the most important messages communicated to campers?

Why do these messages stand out as important to you?

What messages do you think could be communicated more clearly?

How are these messages communicated to campers?

What values do you personally hope the girls leave with at the end of their session?
How do you and other staff members pursue this goal?
How are these values important in girls’ lives?
Why do you personally focus on these values?

In what ways do staff members and/or leadership promote diversity at camp?
In your experience, is there diversity among campers regarding race?
   Sexuality?
   Culture?
   Socioeconomic class?
   Disability?

To what extent do you think efforts to promote diversity are successful?
   What suggestions do you have to improve the promoting of diversity?

What response do you believe a transgender girl would receive if she requested to attend your camp?
   Would she be allowed to attend camp?
   If so, how do you think she would be treated while attending by other girls and staff?
      Do you think she would feel welcomed?
   If not, what leads you to think she wouldn’t be allowed?

What about your camp are you most proud of?
   What about your camp could be improved?

Thank you so much for all the information you’re providing. I would now like to shift to discuss the messages GSUSA communicates to the staff members working at Girl Scout camps.
Messages Communicated to Staff Members

What messages does GSUSA – the national organization – communicate to you and fellow staff members?

   How does GSUSA communicate these messages to you?
   How clear are these messages?

What messages does your specific Girl Scout council communicate to you and fellow staff members?

   How does your council communicate these messages to you?
   How clear are these messages?

(Cultural) Imperialism

People frequently refer to Girl Scout camps as having their own “camp culture.” Please describe the culture present in the camp(s) you have worked at.

What happens if staff members act in a way that strays from this camp culture?

   How do other staff members respond?
   How does leadership respond?

Please tell me about a specific time when someone strayed from camp culture.

   How did other staff members respond?
   How did the leadership respond?

Describe ways in which the camp you have worked at has supported staff members from various cultures.

   Please describe a specific time when a staff member from another culture was supported.

How has your camp not supported staff members from various cultures – or in what ways could they improve?
Please describe a specific time when a staff member from another culture was not supported.

What messages do camp leadership and council employees portray about race, gender, socioeconomic class, and sexuality among staff members?
   How are these messages communicated?
   What messages are portrayed about staff with disabilities?
      How are these messages communicated?

Do you feel like individuality and self-expression are welcomed among staff members?
   Please explain. If you could provide some specific examples, that would help me better understand.

How does leadership (camp admin.) serve you and other employees?
   Do you feel like staff’s ideas and concerns are listened to? Please explain. If you could provide specific examples, that would be helpful.

**White Supremacism**

In what ways do you see diversity among staff members?
   Race?
   Gender?
   Sexuality?
   Class?
   Disabilities?
   Others?

In what ways do you *not* see diversity among staff members?
   Is there a dominant race/gender/sexuality/class/ability among staff members?
Why do you think this happens?
Implicit bias/chance/self-selection/etc?

Do you believe a diverse community is fostered among staff members?
If yes, why do you believe this?
If no, please explain.
What do you think leadership and/or council employees can do to increase diversity among camp staff (if applicable).

Capitalism
What has working at a Girl Scout camp offered you?
Extrinsically (money, praise, resume-building, applicable experience, etc.)?
Intrinsically (doing good, empowering young girls and women, helping society, etc.)?

Patriarchy
How would you describe the level of freedom you have or don’t have to make your own decisions while working at camp?
What aspects of your personality/behavior are you encouraged to exercise at camp?
What aspects of your personality/behavior are you encouraged to tone down or suppress while at camp?

In what ways is the leadership development of camp staff promoted?
How do camp admin and/or the council encourage your development of leadership skills?

In what ways is the leadership development of camp staff not promoted?
How do camp admin and/or the council discourage your development of leadership skills?
When you hear the word “empowerment,” what do you think of?

Do you feel empowered as a staff member?

Describe a specific time when you felt empowered in your role as a camp staff member.

Describe a specific time when you did not feel empowered in your role as a camp staff member.

Girl Scout slogans often describe the organization, as well as camp specifically, as a “place for every girl.” What do you think about this statement? (Do what extent to you think camp is a place for every girl?)

What has been your overall experience working in an all-female-identifying environment?

How has not having a male supervisor affected your experience working in this environment?

Staff Relationships and Communication

How would you describe your overall experience working at a Girl Scout camp?

How would you describe your relationships and interactions with other staff members?

Please provide examples.

Tell me about a time – or multiple times – when you had a conflict with a fellow staff member.

How did both of you handle the conflict?

How did this interaction affect your overall experience working at camp?

Tell me about a time – or multiple times – when a fellow staff member encouraged you and lifted your spirits while working at camp.

What was your relationship with this staff member like?

How did this interaction affect your overall experience working at camp?
Would you recommend working at a Girl Scout camp to others?

What makes you feel this way?

Thank you for your thoughtful responses. Those are all the questions I have.

**Conclusion**

Before we finish this interview, are there any other thoughts you would like to offer about the messages communicated within Girl Scout camps or your interactions with other staff members?

I can’t thank you enough for participating in this interview. The answers you gave me provided a lot of useful information, and I can’t wait to add your thoughts to my study. You can find my contact information on the copy of the consent form I gave you to take home, so please feel free to contact me if you have any additional thoughts on this subject. Is it okay if I contact you again in the future if I have follow-up or clarifying questions?

Thank you again.